

SYAMALKANTI SENGUPTA

# Caste Status Group Aggregate And Class

An Inquiry into the social stratification  
in rural West Bengal



FIRMA KLM PRIVATE LIMITED  
CALCUTTA : : : 1979

Dr. Syamalkanti Sengupta is a young social anthropologist of repute and much promise. He is in touch with the growing analytical tools of anthropological research. A lecturer in Anthropology, Calcutta University; he received his M. Sc degree in Anthropology in 1963 with specialisation in Advanced Social Anthropology and topped the list in first class. He earned his Ph. D. in 1968 from the University of Calcutta for his meticulous research on 'society and economy of the Mahalis of West Bengal' as a University Grants Commission Fellow. In 1969 he became Premchand Roychand scholar in letters of the University of Calcutta for his thesis submitted to the University of Calcutta on 'The Social System of a Bengal Village'. Dr. Sengupta is the recipient of University Gold Medal, Saratchandra Mitra Medal and Mouat Gold Medal. Since 1971 he has been engaged in research for unveiling the structure of Social Stratification in rural West Bengal and has published five other books.

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Recognition of academic indebtedness is a universal usage. It is customary to acknowledge indebtedness of an anthropologist to other anthropologists. It gives me pleasure to recognise my academic indebtedness to my teachers and other scholars of the discipline in which I have specialised myself from the University of Calcutta. It is a fond effort, in my part to acknowledge my teachers, their graceful appreciation as no expression of acknowledgement is adequate to estimate my indebtedness to them. In India, the teachers (*Gurus*) and their disciples (*Sishyas*) are bound in *Guru-Sishya* ties. The relationship of the *Gurus* and the *Sishyas* is reciprocally beneficial and is more than extra-academic. The teachers look upon their *Sishyas* as their successors of knowledge (*Gyan*) and view of life (*Jivan darshan*). In such view of *Guru-Sishya* relationship, I feel shy to express the quantity of my indebtedness to my teachers as a token of respect to their supervisions of the work I did. Virtually, I have sought and have been seeking their guidance all through my research career. As a matter of overt expression I am inclined, like many of my brethren of the discipline (*Guru bhai*) to recognise their fountain of knowledge which helped me to propound logic and to earn critical outlook on the present work. But it is just an expressin of many covert feelings.

Late Prof. M. N. Basu, previous Head of the Department of anthropology, the University of Calcutta, who almost all the time taught me to disagree with the western concept of caste system and to establish an ethnoscociological base of it, trained me to observe the phenomenon empirically. He offered me during his life time all sincere and affectionate help so that I could complete the work and allowed me sufficient time and space for conducting the field-work, taking considerable teaching load on his shoulder. In preparing the present problem, I had no fecund argument with Dr. P. K. Bhowmick, the present professor and Head of the Department in Anthropology as because he had more interest on tribal situation in India rather than stratification. However, I gained a maquette for my problem from his scattered but pudsy works in several tribal villages of Midnapur,

West Bengal. I am grateful to him as I had the 'fortune' of handling many of his papers, the reprints of which the librarian of the department kindly handed me over for my acquaintance with the land and people of Midnapur, West Bengal. Besides my teachers, other scholars of the discipline gave me their patience hearing, fixed time for discussion and extended their comments. Dr. A. K. Das, Deputy Director, Cultural Research Institute, Government of West Bengal, kindly had gone through a portion of my manuscript and offered suggestion. He published two papers of mine related to the present topic in his departmental *Bulletin* with proper editing which encouraged me with the incentive for future extension of the work for substantiating my hypotheses. Dr. S. C. Sinha, ex-director of Anthropological Survey of India and at present Vice-Chancellor, Visva Bharati University pricked my consciousness about Indianess of anthropological understanding of Indian society. He was highly critical about earlier works and virtually wanted me to probe the problem genuinely of my own. His discussion, his papers on the castes and *Bhadralok-Chhotolok* interaction inspired me to understand the problem critically.

Many scholars of my country, wittingly or unwittingly, helped me with their suggestions and cursory comments. I extend my gratitude to all of them.

In 1973, when I met Dr. Marriott (University of Chicago), Dr. Lynch (New York City University), Dr. David (Michigan State University), Dr. Tambiah, Dr. Gamburd, Dr. Barnett and Dr. Haimendorf in Pre-Congress session, IX International Congress for Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held at Michigan State University, I discussed with them about my paper on stratification to exchange my views with them. This paper had empirical base. I got useful insight from their discussions. Marriott specially, sent me his brief comment on the paper. This enabled me to extend my work further. Besides, Dr. Marriott was kind enough to send me three of his recent papers namely "Toward an ethnoscience of south Asian caste systems" (1973), "Caste systems" (1973) and "Hindu transactions : diversity without dualism" (1974). In all these papers I got many ethnoscience materials. I am really indebted to him as because he sent those xeroxed articles long before the publications allowing me to look into the current trends of his thought.

Lastly, I offer my sincere thanks to the residents, of the two villages (*Kotaigarh* and *Benapur*) who were surprisingly helpful to me for understanding the ethnoscociological base of stratification in rural West Bengal. It is true that they are conscious about this phenomenon but are quite shy to express it to a stranger scholar, who is not a member of their village. I am really grateful to them as they opened their heart to me.

## PREFACE

### I

I think that this work is original. This originality is shaped up through long-term field-work in a specific area of research and by substantial thorough going of the books and papers written on Indian castes and other communities. My training in anthropology was initiated under Late Prof. T. C. Das, former Head of the Department of Anthropology, the University of Calcutta. He taught me to disapprove the social facts written in books and papers as a precondition of field-work. Social fact has to be judged being free from bias without any 'imposed' meaning to it. I tried to start my work in the area and got new but useful insight for grasping the notion of stratification of the rural people. This study is original and a solitary effort for at least five reasons : (i) for the first time the caste is made understandable with status group aggregate and class in terms of stratification. The study of stratification has long been under the domain of research of the sociologists; and anthropologists have seldom handled with this aspect of society; (ii) the status group aggregates are the collectivities of certain castes, and other communities may be considered as status group aggregate each for fair uniformity in the *style of life* of its members though they are divided into clan groups or various subdivisions. The study of status group aggregates have been neglected in Indian anthropology so far in terms of stratification; (iii) the stratification concept and its dimensions have been studied by the sociologists limiting their interests toward industrial society. The stratification of rural agrarian society is neglected by the anthropologists and even the sociologists have put no adequate importance to it; (iv) the traditional Indian society with special interest to its caste system was studied. In many occasion the changing urban society of India was emphasised though none of the studies was exclusively relevant to stratification. Moreover, none emphasised the comparison between stratification patterns which exist in industrial society and agrarian society. The present study attempts to do such comparison to express sharp contrast between the two and

lastly; (v) the power concept in Indian social organisation and its rule in allocating individual's position in the order of stratification have been stressed exhaustively in the present work.

## II

The entire thesis is distributed in six chapters with an introduction hinting at reasons of selecting the villages, the choice of units and main purport of the study. The approach is ethnoscioiological. This work aims at certain things that are true about caste systems in rural West Bengal. It aims at some parts of cultural analysis of caste systems, using concepts of kinds that are supposed to be understood and accepted by the villagers of West Bengal about their social systems. The authoratative texts' view of castes and field observation of anthropologists pointed out that the text-books' view is mainly 'prescriptive' while that of empirical finding is 'descriptive'. I use the 'prescriptive' and 'descriptive' documents here as analytical tools of ethnoscioiology which I compared with Weberian and Parsonian *style* of understanding general social system. Besides, I have brought in many places the comparison of non-caste societies in terms of stratification to present a sharp contrast in understanding the phenomenon. I have used the indigenous categories instead of translating them into different categories of our own, firstly because, I do not believe that indigenous categories are same as our own. Secondly, I assume that the principles of arrangements of certain things are quite different from our systems. The reality of rural society of West Bengal is traceable only when the indigenous categories and principles of arrangements of phenomena are analysed.

The nature and forms of stratification are discussed for explaining the Indian situation with general concept of stratification and its applicability in Indian context. The concept of stratification to the sociologists' view and that of the limited anthropologists' view is brought side by side. I have made an effort to explain the generalised sociological concepts of stratification and the limits of their fittings to the society based on caste system. It is apparent from such deal that in certain phenomena general concepts of stratification fit with the phenomena of caste based society; again in certain phenomena these

concepts have no bearing where indigenous principles can be adequately used to explain them.

The caste, the status group aggregate and the class dimensions of stratification are considered for understanding rural stratification of West Bengal. These dimensions are complimentary to each other and *sine-quo-non* for understanding each separately and collectively to explain the stratification in good length. The power concept is used to understand the principles of stratification. The power is prime mover of all deals. One finds the concept of power and its significance in all principles of stratification. Apparently the power concept may be seemed untenable in explaining many principles but in deeper breakthrough its relation to ordered phenomena comes to the significance.

I want to aware the scholars that 'english' is not my mother language. My acquaintance with 'english' language is very rudimentary in nature. Even then, I have used 'english' as the medium of writing to make the study accessible to large number of scholars as it is one of the most widely known languages of the world. I believe that instead of my faltering use of english language, if any, the present study will be understandable to the scholars who want to pick-up knowledge instead of refined language and application of rich vocabularies and good style of writing. If the scholars appreciate my endeavour of understanding the stratification of rural West Bengal—a challenge to applied anthropology and try to enrich it with new more light, my effort will be successful.

August, 7th, 1978  
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SAYAMALKANTI SENGUPTA

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## INTRODUCTION

The villages of India are the underdeveloped rural parts of the subcontinent. The cultural tradition of India is primarily dressed by the villagers. More than eighty percent people of this subcontinent live in villages. Diversity in the life-styles of the village people is discernible in different geographical regions. These differences are guided by certain variables : ecological setting or economic resources, village size, communicability, proximity of the village to the urban area, composition of the residents and the like. However, I do not want to review these different variables which influence the lives of Indian villagers as a whole. I want to confine myself in exhibiting the existing stratification pattern in general and in concrete from the examples of two villages of West Bengal : one from the district of Midnapur and another from the district of Burdwan; these villages are named here as *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* respectively.

The people of the villages aforesaid, are distinguished into number of *Jatis* (castes), and into *Adivasis* (tribes) and *Sampradayas* (religious groups). Again these *Jatis* in both the villages are placed by the villagers into higher and lower ranks on the basis of some differentiated characteristics. Thus there is a hierarchy of strata in each village (Sengupta, 1969, pp. 64-77). *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* are predominantly *Hindu* villages. The hierarchical structure is also regulated by the Hindu religious doctrine. Even the *Adivasis* and the other *Sampradaya* like the *Musalmans* (Muslims) are placed hierarchically by the Hindus. The *Adivasis* and the *Musalma* *Sampradaya* are pushed into the lower ranks of the hierarchy. Nevertheless, the peoples of *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* occupy their position in the villages either as members of a caste or a tribe or a religious group. Again it is noted that different castes are grouped into number of status group aggregates (Sengupta, 1970, pp. 61-78). Besides, affiliation of the villagers into number of 'agricultural categories' or 'classes' at a time is also noted in the villages when their participation in agricultural system is considered (Sengupta, 1973, pp. 47-56). This multi-class affiliation of the

people participating in paddy cultivation is one of the interesting feature in West Bengal villages.

The objective of the study is to find out the nature and extent of existing stratification pattern in general and of these two villages. The stratification has been considered on the levels of caste, status group aggregate and class. The latter one is visualised through the agricultural system of the village. Specially the multi-dimensional approach to the study of stratification is favoured. It needs clarification why I have taken three levels, viz., the caste, the status group aggregate and the class, to bring forth the stratification structure of the villages instead of putting emphasis only on the caste. It seems necessary for the incoming changes that have been occurring in castes' attitudes and values towards productive roles and ritual purity.

*Kotaigarh* is the village of caste dominance though a *Santali* and a *Mundari* speaking *Adivasis* (tribes) live in the village with the caste groups in separate hamlets. Their numerical position is high. The castes belong to different social ranks. The Brahmans (priestly caste) by their ritual cleanliness and two other castes, namely the Kayasthas (scribing caste) and the Sadgops (cultivator caste) by their high secular status determine the new social ranks of the other aspirant castes, which are accepted in the village.

*Benapur* is predominantly, a Hindu village though the *Adi-vasi* (Santal) and the *Musalmans* (Muslim) live in the village in separate hamlets. The castes, here are categorised into two *mega-groups* : the *Bhadraloks* (people of superior culture) and the *Chotoloks* (people of inferior culture). These two words are the contribution of the rural vocabularies which have been used to differentiate the castes into two distinguished life-styles. More conspicuously, the division is pretended on the participation of the people in the productive system. These two broad divisions of castes are placed hierarchically. These are the status group aggregates in the sense of Weber (Gerth and Mills, 1946, pp. 180-195).

In both the villages, agriculture is the main stay of livelihood. The people participate in paddy cultivation in various ways, for instance, as cultivators, share-croppers and labourers. The whole villagers concentrate their attention to agriculture. Even the artisan and other occupational castes resort to agricul-

tural pursuits temporarily or permanently. The *Adivasis* (tribes) and the *Musalmanas* (Muslims) consider the 'paddy cultivation' as their regular occupation. Therefore, I note that the paddy cultivation as a system tends to liberalise the restriction on the participation of the individuals beyond caste-centric occupations. Conversely, paddy cultivation is seemed to be an open earning pursuit to the villagers.

I encounter many classes or categories among the participants in 'paddy cultivation'. Their class-affiliations are determined by their participation processes in the system of paddy production. Stinchcome (1961-1962, pp. 165-176) deals with the class relations in types of agricultural enterprises. He poses to relate types of agricultural enterprises and property systems to the patterns of class relations in rural social life. I pose it to deal with the 'paddy cultivation' enterprise and patterns of class relations in *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur*. The *Adivasis* (tribes) and the *Musalmanas* (Muslims) are seen to mix up with the castes and form many classes. I owe my debt to Stinchcome for the meaning of enterprise. However, this mixing of the castes, the tribes and the Muslims to form a group like a class is a notable feature. This indicates that the separation of castes, tribes or Muslims dissolves when 'paddy cultivation' is considered as a productive system. But in visualising the status group aggregates, I note that the participation in the paddy production is fixed to the particular status group aggregates. In my previous study (Sengupta, 1970, pp. 61-68) I considered the *Adivasis* (tribes) and the *Musalmanas* (Muslims) as status group aggregate instead of taking them as religious entity. The participation by the *Chotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas* as status group aggregation in paddy cultivation enterprise affiliates them into same class or other. The *Bhadraloks* are always excluded from such diverse class affiliations.

This texture of village composition directs me to look into the stratification from the levels of caste, status group aggregate and class. In studying the stratification, of course, I have taken number of dimensions. No doubt, I only have emphasised the main criteria in each level precluding minor associated factors of stratifications. This purposive exclusion of certain factors, I believe does not hinder one's understanding of the stratification system of West Bengal villages as a whole.

It is pointed out earlier that the stratification in *Kotaigarh*

is visualised mainly through the caste system. How far caste exerts its power in regulating the hierarchy of the village? Answer to this question has only been achieved from the villagers' effort of ranking themselves and associated castes and other communities. The concept of 'dominant caste' and its role of placing the castes and other communities in the hierarchical structure have been envisaged here for the understanding of the system.

Agricultural system in *Kotaigarh* again embraces number of categories or classes which are formed on the basis of individuals' participation in the paddy production. Interestingly, it is noted that this class or native category maintains no caste restriction. This has only been plausible for concentration of major acres of lands, to the hands of a few number of families, which means, a large section of the villagers either being landless or possessing negligible holding, depend on others' lands. Further, it is pointed out earlier that the whole villagers participate in paddy cultivation, even the occupational castes resort to agricultural pursuits (Sengupta, 1968 and 1970, pp. 34-40). This encourages high rate of competition and rivalry for lands among the villagers. Class-conflicts and competition thus preclude caste and class-centrism and ensure high rate of class-mobility.

The stratification in *Benapur* is primarily conceptualised through status group aggregates. The degree of social distance between the castes is less emphasised and amount of social distance of the status group aggregates is stressed. It differs from native categories or agricultural classes in the sense that the status group aggregate here is a closed system. The villagers are polarised into several status group aggregates. This polarisation is in many extent caste-bound and culturally determined and a set of castes is grouped into a status group aggregate. Therefore, it is noticed that many caste-proscriptions are selectively overthrown to form a status group aggregate. Again when the 'paddy cultivation' is visualised as a system, a similar type of class formation is encountered like that of *Kotaigarh*. Here, it is found that the important elements of culture are ignored to form class, viz., caste separation and rigidity in the boundary of status group aggregate are consciously relaxed.

There are distinctive culture of caste and status group aggregate. Nevertheless, each of the system as a whole lowers down

its rigidity and mixes up to form classes or native categories but reinforces the systemic rigidity of each outside the productive roles. This therefore maintains the growth of sub-culture. Particularly in cases where the barriers to interaction between members of different classes are circumscribed by law and custom, as in caste society or estate society, the separate development of class culture within wider cultural framework is expected (Rodman, 1968, p. 333). The castes may be separated into higher caste and lower caste divisions. Each of the division has a specific pattern of culture. Likewise both at *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* the lower castes and collectively the *Chotoloks* usually do the job of share croppers and labourers. This means that the lower caste culture and culture of the lower status group aggregate also represent the lower class-culture. There are number of writings on lower class culture. Davis' (1946) culture of underprivileged workers in United States, Smith's (1956) lower class culture tradition in British Guiana, Millers' (1953) lower-class American culture based on studies of gang delinquency, Lewis' (1961) culture of poverty including Cohen and Hodge (1963) are the cases in point.

However, I am less eager to list the lower-class cultural traits as these are largely controversial. But it is important to quote Rainwater (1966, pp. 206-307) who expresses that the members of lower-class adopt *survival strategies* and these are fundamental to understand the lower-class culture. He subscribes that "when the *expressive strategy* fails or when it is unavailable there is the great temptation to adopt a *violent strategy* in which you force others to give you what you used . . . . Finally there is *depressive strategy* in which goals are increasingly constricted to the bare necessities for survival". It is noted that the *violent strategy* is very feeble and *expressive strategy* is moderate and *depressive strategy* is common among lower-class people both at *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur*. I have not the slightest pretension to delineate the characteristics of class culture but to see it in terms of stratification. However, this is enough to quote Rodman (1963, p. 337). "It has been possible to describe briefly, if approximately, some features of lower class, working class, middle class, and upper class. But it has not been impossible to present, without qualification, the unique and

distinctive features of any class culture because of the vast amount of overlapping thus is found".

The ranking of castes and status group aggregate rests on independent criteria though they share certain amount of commonness in some spheres. Concept of ritual status and secular status is manifested in both the systems and the stratification is considered from the differences in distinctive life-styles. The style of life, in both the systems is value oriented. The value is considered both from the ritual and secular standing. The caste is mainly a system through which the people find their salvation of the present life. Many castes live in *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* with specific social rank. There are some criteria which are responsible for the higher and lower social ranks of the castes and the status group aggregates. This hierarchical structure of the village not only embraces the castes but also other residential communities. On number of dimensions the castes are stratified. These dimensions primarily fall into two-fold division : ritual- and secular. It is noted that the villagers consider the criteria of both divisions rigidly and unequally for evaluating the rank of all castes. Some castes are seen to be placed in *high social order* though their secular statuses are low. Again a few castes are given *lower social order* though their secular statuses are high. Therefore, it is assumed that the placing of castes in the stratification is mainly dependent on ritual criteria.

In visualising the stratification and the position of the status group aggregate, it is noted that the *lines of demarcation* among the status group aggregates mainly rest on the secular criteria and the roles of ritual criteria are feeble though their roles are not completely denied of. Thus degree of social distance between the castes of the same status group aggregate is maintained mainly by ritual criteria but the degree of social distance between the status group aggregate is maintained primarily by the secular criteria.

Next to castes and status group aggregate let me think of the classes grow around the 'paddy cultivation' system. Here, the rigidity in caste separation and the boundaries of the status group aggregate are subdued under class formation. The participation of the individuals in 'paddy cultivation' is the determinant of their locations in the classes. Extreme competition and rivalry for lands affiliate the same person at a time into more than one

class or native category. These double affiliations preclude the growth of class sentiment, class-consciousness and engender intra-class conflict. In the sense of Marx, this is a class 'in itself', occurs when the class members do not understand their class position and true class interest (Lipset 1968, p. 299). The placing of class in the stratification both at *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* mainly depends on one's security of employment or participation in the paddy production system. Keeping eyes in these diverse situations of West Bengal villages, I have tried to explain the stratification in three separate levels, viz., caste, status group aggregate and class, and have considered the criteria accordingly which in actual situation become important.

## CHAPTER I

### STRATIFICATION : NATURE AND FORMS

The study of social inequality is a complex and controversial exploration in Anthropology. It is pertinent to mention here that the present thesis may not be free from the mixture of such complexity and controversy. In studying the thesis on 'Patterns of Stratification' in rural West Bengal one may keep in mind that the boundaries of the field study of social inequality or stratification are by no means *fixed* and *firm*. It is mostly because of the differences in conceptions of the scholars in the subject. Some scholars differ in conceptualising the unequal ranking of social units while others consider the inequalities in power, property and 'psychic gratifications' as equally important dimensions of stratification. The first set of the scholars may be considered as 'minimalists' who tend to consider the differences in power and property as the determinants of evaluation and inequality is the resultant of them. The second set of scholars may be called 'maximalists' who view the reciprocal networks of interaction among the major kinds of inequalities that characterise all societies (Tumin, 1970, p. V). My position is among the 'maximalists'.

The problem of inequality has two aspects : distributive and relational. The distributive aspect refers to ways in which different factors, such as, income, wealth, occupation, education, power, skill etc., are distributed in population of a *society*. The relational aspect refers to the ways in which individuals are separated by these criteria and are related to each other within the system of groups and categories (Beteille, 1969, p. 13). Social stratification is a sociological concept and excepting in the recent past the domain of the study of social stratification was restricted to the sociologists. The anthropologists were not interested in studying social stratification as they were engaged mainly in studying the small-scale societies of relatively simpler technology where elaborate systems of social stratification were not recognisable in the truest sense of the term. It is recognisable in industrial society. Whenever, the anthropologists hinted at

the stratification, their arguments were mainly rooted on the social ranking of 'values' of the peoples having limited *division of labour* based on age and sex. Studying the Polynesian society, Shalins (1958) asserts that the status inequality of peoples of Polynesian society has no link with entrepreneurial enterprise and separation of the producers from the factors of production. He points out further that the term *social classes* is only applicable in market-based societies. In kin-oriented societies the status inequality is simply the outcome of the existence of 'status levels'. The sociological definitions of class, stems from the occupational role, class consciousness, class interest and class antagonism are not conceivable in small-scale primitive societies.

In Anglo-saxon usage, the term stratification has broad and inclusive meaning. The term class is generally viewed as a form of stratification. In French, stratification tends to refer specifically to an arrangement of statistical aggregates (Beteille, 1969, pp. 12-13). Dumont (1966) proposes separate meanings of the terms hierarchy and stratification. He opposes the Anglo-American writers in viewing the caste as a form of social stratification. He takes caste as an expression of hierarchy which is a consciously organised principle. On the contrary, the stratification refers to the principle which is constructed by the sociologists on the basis of variable criteria. He raises the question on the usefulness of considering the caste as a form of social stratification. He argues that like contemporary sociologists, if the anthropologists become content with a label borrowed from our own societies, if they confine themselves to consider the caste system as an extreme form of social stratification, they can only record some interesting observations, but by definitions they will exclude all possibilities of enriching our fundamental conceptions. Beteille (1974, p. 38) speaks of certain important properties which caste and class in rural India share in common and that they can be meaningfully studied within a single framework. It is a debating issue and outside the scope of the present thesis whether the term social stratification adequately covers the two phenomena or a new term is necessary.

Recently, Indian society has been facing radical change. The non-competitive structure of production is facing competition today. The student of social stratification is thus in a position in contemporary India to concern himself not simply

with caste in the classical sense but what is happening to caste as they are undergoing modifications in the face of industrialisation (Gould, 1971). It is now to ascertain the nature of transformation and modification of caste structure in India and what light it throws on the processes of social segmentation. The sizeable section of the people of India lives by agriculture. The modes of stratification in India are associated with agrarian modes of production and the patterns of inequality are different from those of the industrial organisation. Dahrendorf (1968) proposes four types of inequalities. Two of these types are related to individuals, viz., (i) natural differences of kind in features, characters and interests and (ii) natural differences of rank in intelligence, talent and strength. The other two types are related to the society; (i) social differentiation of positions and (ii) social stratification based on reputation and wealth and expressed in a rank order of social status. My interest here is mainly on the inequality of stratification type. Dahrendorf speaks of distributive and non-distributive aspects of inequalities. According to this distinction, wealth and prestige belong to area of stratification though they can be accumulated to a considerable extent by a single person. Wealth and prestige are mutually convertible and they are related to each other.

Runciman (1966, pp. 36-52) raises the question of the usefulness of Weber's three-dimensional model of stratification. A person's class-situation, in Weber's sense, is the location which he shares with those who are similarly placed in the processes of production, distribution and exchange. Class-situation itself is a complex phenomenon which embraces aspects of a person's economic situation in society which may not be in strict correlation with each other. They all, however, reflect inequalities directly derived from the productive system so that to speak of a person's class is to speak of his approximate shared location in the economic hierarchy as opposed to the hierarchies of prestige and power. There is always some sort of relation between the hierarchies of class and status but status derives from different aspects of economic behaviour which determine class location itself. Status is generally determined by the style of consumption rather than source and amount of income. In Indian society, status depends not merely on the *style of life* but on the religious beliefs. Stratification by status, depends by

definition on the prestige which people assign to their own and other groups; people may be strong about 'subjective' status in the sense that their own prestige is not what they think it is, but the status-structure of their society, is, in fact, determined solely by the feeling of its members. Runciman speaks of the class-model, status-model and the power-model. Class-model is based on the distinctions of job or incomes and particularly on the economic aspects of a person's job. In status-model, occupation may play an important role though social aspect is more significant than economic aspect. The prestige in a job or the style of life that goes with or the educational qualifications which it requires are the matter of hierarchy of status. In a power-model authority invested in certain occupational position is its most important feature and in class-model the significance of occupation is the wealth or security of tenure which will accrue from it. The users of class-model seldom envisage more than two or three strata. In contrary status model envisages multiplicity of levels.

In studying social stratification my main concern is with certain basic structural phenomena such as, caste, status group aggregate and class. These are social facts in the sense that they exist independently of what individuals perceive and conceive about them and they are not alterable according to the will and pleasure of the people (Durkheim, 1938). The characteristic patterns of social stratification are used here in broad sense. As the social stratification is a social fact, it varies from society to society. The pattern of stratification further changes over time. In India, the distinctions of status have undergone alterations. The change in the patterns of stratification is a group experience and when experience changes, it changes the patterns of stratification. The principal dimensions of social inequality in contemporary societies are inequalities of income, wealth, occupation, education and power. Power is manifest force in relations to domination and subordination (Cole, 1955). There are also inequalities of prestige or honour. In almost all societies 'honour' is distributed differently (Weber, 1946).

Scholars differ in opinion with regard to the aspects of social inequality. Some emphasised great importance to the economic factor because this factor is easy measurable. Therefore, it is considered as more objective. Income and occupation are

taken as important economic factor of inequality. But even the concept of economic factor is differently taken by the scholars. Marx emphasised great importance to the economic aspect of social life. But he neglected the significance of income and occupation as economic factor and for defining social class. The owners of mere labour power, the owners of capital and the land, whose respective sources of income are wage, profit and rent thus wage labourers, capitalists and landowners, constitute three great classes of modern society based on a capitalist mode of production. Marx puts stress on the positions occupied by individuals in the organisation of production. He assigned great significance to the property relations rather than income and occupation. Marx considers the power and status stratification as the product of class stratification (Bottomore, 1965). He argues that the economic interests are basis of all other relationships; there are two classes with conflicting interests in which one exploits the other. The exploiter class receives more than their due share. Marx considers the ownership of property as the life question of any given class (Dahrendorf, 1969b, p. 10).

There are other groups of scholars, who consider power and authority as the basic ingredients of inequality. Some emphasised significance to the political factors (Runciman, 1963). They denied that the basic cleavage was not between the rich and poor, propertied and propertyless but between the elites and the masses or the rulers and the ruled (Beteille, 1972, p. 5) Apart from these economic and political factors, there is third factor called status factor. Status is the positive or negative estimation of the social 'honour' or prestige and usually it is not connected with the wealth and power. Status is highly value stricken and therefore the quality of honour varies greatly in different societies. In India, status or 'honour' is determined by the opposition of ritual purity and pollution. Dahrendorf (1969, pp. 16-44) considers that every human society is a moral community. Each society recognises norms to regulate the conduct of its members. The maintenance of norms requires sanction. The conformists are rewarded and the deviants are penalised. The origin of stratification lies with the closely related trinity of norms, sanction and power.

The different aspects of stratification are viewed by the sociologists in different ways. Marx was concerned with the

sources of inequality. He pointed out that these sources rest primarily in the different positions, men occupy in the productive organisation. The owners of the instruments of production take the advantage of accumulating more share of the productive output and thereby deprive the members of the working class, who produce the goods and services. Nevertheless Marx has been objected from various sources on the grounds that the analysis of the social stratification requires the consideration of the differences in the roles. For instance, differences between those of the roles of owning and managing business between business and professional roles and the roles of skilled and unskilled labour. Marx also neglected the importance of lineage, kinship and ethnic affiliations of the societies that are ethnically differentiated (Barbar, 1968) Marx emphasised the class conflict which generated from the productive or occupational structure of the society. His overemphasis in it tended him uncarefully away from the consideration of other sources of conflict like religious and ethnic differences etc. In considering caste and status group aggregate these sources are awfully at the root of the conflict. The central theme in the structure of inequality to Marx, is the exploitation of the working class. Weber, on the other hand shares much of Marx's view. He argues that control over productive property gives crucial control over life in general and shapes the thinking and action of those who exercise these control. There are bases other than economic base, according to Weber that impel men to form groups or identify with each other. Honour is an important concern which shapes individuals' behaviour and *style of life*. Honour comes from 'status', that is one's position on a ladder of evaluation of one's social worth (Tumin, 1970, pp. 1-2). Tawney (1961) in explaining the bases of social and economic inequality combines Marx and Weber. He explains the ways in which the power generated by the control over the means of production. Those who have power and those who possess status symbols, they manage them to enrich their privilege positions and thereby rationalise their positions in terms of social necessity, social welfare and productivity. However, the scholars who want to view the stratification based on economic factor and whose main tradition is associated with Marxian thought may be considered as reductionists. On the other hand, those who emphasise both economic and non-

economic factors as well, may be considered as pluralists. The reductionists and the pluralists differ in conceiving the social inequality. Though the reductionists do not deny the existence of the gradation of power and status yet they design significance on the fundamental distinction of *social classes* based on the control over the instruments of production. The political factors, prestige and positions with respect to market are derivatives of it. On the other hand, the pluralists though assign a central place to class in sociological analysis yet they consider that the status and power are also important factors and not wholly guided by the economic factors. They believe that the class, status and power are closely interdependent although none of them can be explained fully by the others (Beteille, 1972, pp. 5-6).

The theorists of elite concept consider that the elites decide the fate of the masses. Burnham (1942) points out that the elites in modern society are composed of managers, especially the managers of the industrial organisations. But Mills (1956) proposes that the elites are composed of the powerful government officials, directors of industry and military chiefs. The industrialising countries are more or less similar though they vary from each other in many points. The central trait in all industrialising countries is the inevitable and eternal separation of industrial men into managers and the managed (Kerr *et al.* 1962). However, Kerr *et al.* pointed out that in the advanced stages of industrialisation, the social systems of the industrialising countries tend to converge on a common type. Aron (1967) remarks that the surplus value extracted from the working force is invested both in capitalist and socialist countries. In both, the managers take the decision of investment, only in socialist countries these decisions are part and parcel of government framed plan and in capitalist countries these decisions are shaped by the need of private enterprises. The industrial productive system requires skilled, professional and mobile labour force. Industrialisation, therefore, avoids tradition, family status and crosses the limit of class, religion and caste. The importance of skill regardless of the social origin ensures high rate of mobility, as a result, stratification in industrial society is characterised by the wave of differentiation between strata and the consistency between different dimensions of stratification (Goldthorpe, 1964).

Parsons (1953), Davis and Moore (1945) developed the stratification theory recently. They consider that the prestige dimension of the stratification can be applicable to all positions in the occupational structure. There are two factors associated with prestige : system of values and functional significance of roles embedded in the occupational structure : Relative capacity of a role for producing goods and services is the determinant of functional significance. The salient characteristics of functional theory advanced by Davis and Moore (1945, pp. 242-249) are : (i) inevitability of functional differentiation, (ii) differential ability for functions, (iii) differential evaluation of social position and duties, (iv) reward for different functions according to values and (v) social differentiation and stratification emerge out of differential values and rewards.

Indian *varna* system is propounded on functional differentiation of the four *varnas* : Brahman (spiritual and scholarly function), Kshatriya (administration), Vaisya (trade and commerce) and Sudra (manual work). The *jati* system is derived from the *varna* system and it has same kind of functional differentiation on the basis of *Sakti* (ability) and *Guna* (quality) of the *jati*. These *Sakti* and *Guna* are evaluated differentially for various social positions and privileges in accordance with the values. The *jatis* are hereditary groups. Each *jati* performs its function according to its *Sakti* and *Guna* for necessary reward meant for it. The rewards for different functions cause social differentiation in *jati* system. How *Sakti* and *Guna* are hereditarily determined is a matter of controversy (Sengupta, 1973b).

Parsons (1963) also emphasised on the aspects of power and also set two propositions : (a) power is a positive social phenomenon, capacity for achieving goals in social system and power is a negative phenomenon which when prevents others from their wishful acting at will and (b) power is not a zero-sum phenomenon, if one has more power, the other necessarily has less power. The scientific orientation of the stratification by Parsons (1953), Davis and Moore (1945) has been criticised from many corners as they favoured inequality in social system, underemphasised the conflict aspect of it and considered social stability rather than change (Lipset and Bendix, 1966).

The study of caste system is the most useful approach for understanding the traditional Indian society. Fundamentally

it is not an economic or a political system but a hierarchical system grew around the concept of pollution and purity. It is true that in traditional Indian caste system, the pollution and purity are very important determinants of caste hierarchy but to day, the economic and political distinctions have stronghold on the caste hierarchy. The tribal societies are relatively simple and not marked by rigid social inequalities although personal distinction and *age and sex* create differentiation among their population (Sahlins, 1958). Kinship plays important role in these societies and where lineages exist, it is unequally ranked (Pritchard, 1940). Among the Kachins of highland Burma, the rules of kinship and marriage place the individuals in hierarchical order (Leach, 1964). The studies of Barber (1968b) on the stratification into caste-based Hindu society makes one to feel that the need of multidimensional approach for stratification study, is *sine-quo-non* in Hindu India. In considering the independentness of the dimensions of stratification it is conceived that each dimension is independent from each other but empirically the dimensions are interdependent which means that they affect one another in certain extent retaining a measure of autonomy. To cite an example, let me bring the situations of two West Bengal villages : *Kotaigarh* is still under the decisive dominance of the 'caste' and *Benapur* is under the dominance of status group aggregate where the whole range of caste is divided into two binary divisions viz. the high (*Bhadralok*) and low (*Chotolok*) castes. Each of these binary divisions is conceived of as a mega-group or a status group aggregate. Here the dimensions, viz. occupation, prestige, income, landownership, power, education, religion and ritual purity, family and ethnic-group position are to some extent independent. The Muchi (tanner) caste is ranked low at *Kotaigarh* in the structure of stratification on the ground that they perform low occupation. Here occupational prestige is considered important regardless of the other dimensions. Again, then I note in the same village that the position of Brahman or priestly caste was considered high for their ritual purity regardless of their income. Again, the Sadgop or landholder caste secures power through ownership of land and occupies the same rank in the structure of stratification with the Kayastha or scribing caste though it performs low occupation than the latter. Thus dimensions of stratification are independent

to some extent though they affect one another because of their interdependence. In Benapur, a person of *Chotolok* status group aggregate was denied of the rank better than other *Chotolok* members of the aggregate though he was a shopowner in the village. Here the occupational prestige finds itself ineffective because it devoids of power, education and ritual purity. Therefore, I may presume that in concrete situation the importance of one dimension may be more than the other. Further, I may assume that the dimensions of stratification interdependently become effective. The specific circumstances of *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* have been the cases in points.

Power as one of the dimensions is defined as the capacity of achieving goal in social systems (Parsons, 1963). Parsons considers power on functional ground. In *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur*, like other societies too, some *roles* have more power and others have less and thus the power is differentiated into stratified structure, for instance, Brahman's *role* as priest and Napit's *role* as barber in the ritual, signify that the differential power is allotted for them. Again power of the *Bhadralok* as landowner and *Chotolok* as tiller of the soil in agricultural system proves that the power has a stratified structure. Power comes from different sources. These sources vary from society to society. In *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur*, it comes from the control over ownership of lands or other economic resources and from the support of preponderating section of the villagers or people of the area. Besides these, there are many other sources of gaining power. Therefore, in quoting Barber (1957) I may conclude that "it does not stand in any simple one-to-one relation with any other dimensions of social stratification".

Next to power let me look to the occupational prestige as a dimension of stratifications. The functional significance of full-time productive roles differ from one another. Hence, the productive roles are evaluated in higher and lower grades i.e., the productive roles have differential occupational prestige. Returning to our *Kotaigarh* caste system and the status group aggregates of *Benapur*, the matter can be explained more precisely. The occupation of priesthood gets more prestige than that of agricultural farming. Again barbering has more prestige than that of washing the clothes. The *Bhadraloks'* abstention from manual work of agriculture offers them better prestige from the

*Chotoloks* who are attached more intimately with the manual work.

Now in looking to income and wealth as dimensions of social stratification it is worth to consider the productive roles. Keeping in mind, the situations of *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* I deal with the various productive roles with different prospects of earnings and formation of capital. Accumulation of wealth does not depend on occupational prestige. The Brahman of *Kotaigarh* whose principal income comes from priesthood is much less than many owner-cultivator Solanki or Mahisya families, the two cultivator castes of the middle rank. Income and wealth inversely regulate the educational opportunities. The tribals (Santals and Bhumijas) and the Mahisya or Solanki castes of the village occupy roles of same relative prestige but of different income. The low income of the tribals puts them into the disadvantageous position in affording to their children. There exists differential condition of disposable income. This condition guides the access to specific *style of life* that is taken as symbol of a given amount of occupational prestige or power or education (Barber, 1968). Education differs from individual to individual, the differential type and amount of education and experiences conceive differential amount of knowledge. Therefore education forms a stratified structure of the society. Education affects one's position independently of other dimensions. The literate Sadgop (landowning caste) members of *Kotaigarh* get more 'honour' than illiterate Sadgop members of the same income and occupational prestige.

Ritual purity is one of the main planks on which the stratification structure of the village rests (Dube, 1956). This forms an independent dimension though other dimensions may be subdued occasionally by its dominance as a criterion. The villagers of *Kotaigarh* are placed in the ladder of stratification according to caste's ritual purity.

There is another term of hierarchy, an auspicious-inauspicious polarity. Iron is black, hence inauspicious, so blacksmith is ranked below silversmith, who in turn is below the goldsmith. Pocock (1960 and 1962) notes that the rank of these castes is correlated with the extent of network of exchanges they are involved in. A blacksmith is involved in a restricted village network, a goldsmith in an extended or urban one.

As regards family and ethnic-group position it is a common observation that the kingroups are extended from the ethnic groups and they have considerable functions in socialisation process of the society. The family status is evaluated according to the performances in socialisation, service, education and *style of life*. Thus families have stratified ranks : higher or lower. The behaviour of the villagers depends on the rank of the families (Barber, 1961). The family and ethnic group position is a dependent dimension of stratification.

Cultural factor often regulates the rank in the stratification. Widow remarriage, levirate or sororate customs, domestication of pigs, sacrifice of fowl and pig in rituals, age at marriage, custom of paying bride-price in marriage, diet or cooking method, commensal relations, cleanliness indicate the position of a caste or a tribe in the stratification structure. This is a dependent dimension. Ritual service is another dimension of stratification (Sengupta, 1970). Giving and receiving of ritual services regulate the position of a caste or a tribe in the structure of stratification. The receiving of ritual services of the Brahman indicates good rank. Denying of ritual services to castes indicates lower rank of the denied (Sengupta, 1970). I have studied the rank of the castes and the tribe and the status group aggregates correlating all these factors of stratification.

The formation of classes and their respective ranks in the villages are important. To Marx, productive system is the nucleus around which other elements of society are organised (Lipset, 1964). Thus Marxist definition of class emphasises the aggregate of any persons who perform the same role in the productive system. On the basis of relations to the means of production, Marx (1925-26, pp. 862-863) classifies (i) capitalists or owners of the instruments of production, (ii) workers and (iii) landowners. I encounter two classes at *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* in the Marxist sense : landowners and the workers whom they employ. The landowners of *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* belong to three types : absentee landowner (*Mahajan*), owner-supervisor (*Malik*) and owner-cultivator (*Chasi* or *Krisan*). Similarly the agricultural workers have various shades : share cropper (*Bhagchasi* or *Bhag-krisan*), contract cultivator (*Sanja chasi*), day-labourer (*Din-majur* or *Chhut krishan*) and seasonal or contractual labourer (*Nagare* or *Baramasi majur*). In normal times these structural

torically three types of societies : (a) Ancient society based on slavery (b) Feudal society based on serfdom and (c) Capitalist society with divisions into capitalists and workers. Apart from these broad divisions Marx discussed about another society called Asiatic Society. Marx (1964) postulated that in a very early stage of human society all men were both owners and workers. He thought that the system obtained in India was one of the primary modes of production and he called it the 'Asiatic mode'. In it individual is a part of a tribal or communal entity (Thorner, 1966). Marx (1964, p. 83) discusses the internal working of it and says that the Asiatic form necessarily survives longest and most stubbornly. This is due to the fundamental principle on which it is based, that is the individual does not become independent of the community; that the circle of production is self-sustaining unity of agriculture and craft manufacture. Marx speaks of different types of organisation for purposes of work within this Asiatic form but the basic economic feature of the system is the combination of manufacture and agriculture within the small community which thus becomes entirely self-sustaining and contains within itself all conditions of production and surplus production (Thorner, 1966). However, this classification is questioned now-a-days by many scholars arguing that it fails to include many changes that have taken place in industrial society since Marx's time (Bottomore, 1965). The Asiatic society is characterised by two main features : (i) organisation of production in the village by castes, each with a hereditarily ordained occupational specialisation and (ii) domination of large territories by a state consisting of a despot and bureaucracy often controlling large-scale irrigation project (Marx, 1964). The relation between the two is one of simple extortion of tribute or taxes from the villagers by the state bureaucrats. The village thus loses its surplus production to the bureaucracy which has blocked the further development. This therefore, leads to stagnation which the oriental society suffers from, in comparison to the West (Littlejohn, 1974, p. 13). The bureaucrats commanded by a despot, exploit the population of the village social system. This has not been accepted by the anti-Marxist scholars. Hence, the literature on the oriental despotism has become largely polemical (Wittfogel, 1959 and Aron, 1968).

We have two kinds of inequality with respect of two types:

of societies : pre-industrial and industrial. India's position is intermediate between the two. It is neither pure pre-industrial and nor industrial society. The pre-industrial societies tend to be estate type or caste type whereas the characteristic divisions of industrial societies are either classes or strata (Beteille, 1972, p. 8). The caste society is segmented and founded on elaborate and rigid principles. Some scholars argue that the caste is a structural phenomenon and it has world-wide existence to refer to all rigid social distinctions. Others argue that it is unique as Indian system of referring social distinctions (Gould, 1872). In caste system inequalities are fundamentally rooted on religion (Bergel, 1962). The social distinctions are accepted by the people in principle. On the other hand, the castes are closely associated with ownership and control of lands. The caste exerts great influence when it becomes sizeable landowner. The castes have distinctive *style of life* and in this respect they differ from one another.

In India, hierarchical values and norms are deeply and widely accepted (Dumont, 1966). The acceptance of this hierarchical values and norms in principle is philosophically justified through the concepts of *Dharma* and *Karma*. Indian social system is harmonic in nature in the sense that the existential order and normative order of inequalities are in consistency. Inequalities in India, are legitimate and in fact they continue to exist (Beteille, 1972, p. 8). In India, the castes exist in normal environment with hierarchical values. The conflict between castes exists though limited in nature and it emerges from a few contradictions between the normative and existential orders. This nature of conflict is visible in India because of the extreme and manifest form of inequalities. This does not necessarily prevents change in Indian society. The conflict and change are the characteristics of industrial society. It is true that conflict and change are discernible in Indian society for the reason that India is not only an agricultural society it has its industrial sector also. It is gradually reshaping its harmonic social system into disharmonic system (Beteille, 1972, p. 16).

The inequalities which exist in rural West Bengal not only have sought through the frame of reference provided by caste and status group aggregate but also in terms of ownership, control and use of lands. Therefore, this aspect of study is devo-

ted to understand stratification in terms of caste, status group aggregate and class. The people of the villages under study have their own conception and perception of their social inequalities. They categorise them being divided among themselves on the basis of role they play in the productive system. The relations between agrarian classes are not only the relationship of conflict but also of cohesion. Inequalities with respect of ownership, control and use of lands and security of jobs and distribution of the products not only bring conflict and antagonism among different classes. These also often take the shape of political tension.

## CHAPTER II

### TWO WEST BENGAL VILLAGES

The two villages, which I have taken here, as unit of study are *Kotaigarh* in South-western part of West Bengal and *Benapur* in central part of the State. *Kotaigarh* is located in the district of Midnapur, more towards the southern part of the district and *Benapur* is situated in the district of Burdwan, precisely in the South-eastern part of the district. *Kotaigarh* represents a typical illustration of Midnapur village of the alluvial plain. It lies nearly eighty-eight miles west of Howrah railway station and about eleven miles south of Kharagpur railway station. It is within and under the jurisdiction of Narayangarh Police station. The river Kangshabati sends its tributary at about eight miles east of the village. Digha sea-shore, a small tourists' attraction is only within hundred miles to the far south of the village. The Kharagpur-Contai or Kharagpur-Digha bus road lies at about 5 miles west of the village. Contai is an overcrowded, commercially busy and small cross-road semi-town settlement which is disturbed in every fifteen or twenty minutes by the plying buses, either of governmental or of private enterprises.

*Benapur* is a village under Memari police station of Burdwan district. It is located at about sixteen miles south-east of Burdwan town and only three miles north of the boundary line between Hooghly and Burdwan districts. Pandua, another busy commercial semi-town settlement lies at about fourteen miles south of the village. Both the villages (*Kotaigarh* and *Benapur*) are located in the fertile alluvial plain and are moderately populated; the non-irrigated rice fields all around the villages receive water from the nature's shedding. Rice is grown adequately both for commercial and other capitals. The waves of social, political and economical changes reach in both the villages in recent times. The villages provide the examples of the combination of traditional and modern, urban and rural, industrial and non-industrial ways of living. The caste-bound occupation has been replaced by the flow of industrial goods; scope of white-collar jobs and small-scale business enterprise in the village and in the area

are driving the villagers toward 'caste free' occupations. Important differences in social structure, size and shape, population, composition of the people and ways of living exist between the villages. But they belong predominantly in the same or common Hindu tradition and represent almost similar organisational composition as a unit of the same State (West Bengal) and economy, viz. 'land and grain'.

In both the villages, paddy cultivation is the main economic activities of the villagers, though land is distributed to many castes and communities yet the major acres of lands are under the control of the high caste peoples and the *Bhadraloks* (gentry). The lower caste peoples, the *Adivasis* (tribes) and the *Musalmans* (Muslims) are mostly labourers and share-croppers. Therefore, both similarity and differences in these two villages are encountered which adhere relatively greater value to them for the study of stratification in West Bengal villages.

#### KOTAIGARH : A MIDNAPUR VILLAGE

*Kotaigarh* like other hundreds of villages in the alluvial tract of Midnapur is encircled by paddy fields and big trees. This nucleated village is located centrally towards the eastern border of Narayangarh police station. The nearest railway station of the village is located at about seven miles south-west of the village. The people call it Narayangarh railway station. This is a small station and only a few passenger-trains stop at the station platform in long interval. The other big railway junction is Kharagpur. *Kotaigarh* villagers avail of, the train services both from these stations at their conveniences. Kharagpur is a place of frequent visit of the villagers, because this is the only nearest big town and good marketing centre. At about eleven miles south of Kharagpur-Contai bus route, there is a small village, namely *Mokrampur* and a *Chak* (literally means place for market relations). From this *Chak* a mud road of ten feet wide traverses straight to *Kotaigarh* at a distance of five miles east. The paddy lands are seen to stretch from all along the road sides.

From little outside the entrance, the village is seen to submerge under the green foliages. Several native trees give shelter and shadow to the villagers, from the outskirts of the village to its centre. Banyan, tamarind, cocoanut, acasia, date-palm,

palmyra-palm, mango, wood-apple and many other trees offer the villagers both fuel and fruits and congenial shades throughout the year. The post-office and the village market with number of shops of different commodities are located a few yards inside the eastern outskirts. *Kotaigarh* looks like any of hundreds of villages with two Siva temples, shrines of Lord *Hari* and Goddess *Sitala* (presiding deity of epidemic diseases) within the heart of the village, *Jahersthan* (sacred grove of the tribe) and seats of God *Dharma* (God of righteousness) and *Garam* (tutlery deity of the village) under Acasia or Banyan tree. Two rows of straw-thatched shops having mud plastered wall over splitted bamboo are situated within the heart of the village. A large open market (*hat*) place supplies the villagers their required commodities. An open ground at the northern outskirts is treasured by the tribes and the untouchables on the day of cock-fight (*Murga Larai*) in the month of *Paus* (December-January), *Magh* (January-February) and *Phalguna* (February-March) of the Bengali Calendar. A rural health and midwifery centre imparts the knowledge of safe birth to the pregnant women of the village and extends assistances during delivery. Hundreds of huts of different shades, materials and structure are found to scatter in the village varying from mud-walled commodious rooms of straw-thatched or tin roofs to small rooms of bamboo-walled and two sloped straw thatched roofs. There are an upper primary and a high junior basic schools to impart education to the village children.

The total population of the village is 1,219 and is distributed in 211 families. The break-down of the families and the population into castes and other communities by the three polar groups such as the Brahmans, the non-Brahmans and the tribes are given in the table 1.

TABLE 1  
Three polar groups of the population at *Kotaigarh*

| Polar group | No. of family | Population |
|-------------|---------------|------------|
| Brahman     | 11            | 73         |
| Non-Brahman | 120           | 693        |
| Tribe       | 80            | 453        |
| Total       | 211           | 1,219      |

The tribal group consists of the Mahalis and the Bhumijas. The former speaks Santali and the latter one speaks Mundari language. They are collectively known as *Adivasi*, means tribe. The non-Brahman group comprises of three categories of castes. These are ritually the 'clean', the 'unclean' and the 'untouchable' castes. The main test of 'clean' from the 'unclean' caste lies in whether or not a Brahman or upper caste members can accept drinking water at its hands (Hutton, 1963, pp. 71, 211). Similarly, purification is strictly necessary as a result of contact with certain low castes whose traditional occupations, whether actually followed or not or whose mode of life places them outside the pale of Hindu society are commonly spoken of as untouchables (Hutton, 1963, p. 78). A caste whose water is acceptable to the upper castes is known as *Jal-chal* and whose water is not acceptable, conveniently defined as *Jal-achal*. (Hutton, 1963, p. 212). The 'unclean' and the 'untouchable' both are ritually 'unclean' but the former do not spread ritual pollution by their physical contact as the latter do (Mathur, 1964, p. 69).

*Kotaigarh* is a revenue village having affiliation to five small wards, namely *Kotai-purba* (east), *Kotai-dakshin* (south), *Kotai-uttar* (north), *Basudebpur* and *Mahammadpur* in the west. All these wards are interrelated in number of ways and separate existence of each is hardly possible. The unmetalled road which links the village with the motorable road at *Mokrampur Chak* (place for market relations) divides the village into two distinct segments. The road runs in the east-west direction and divides the village into northern and southern segments. The northern one is the residential unit of the tribes and the ritually 'unclean' and the 'untouchable' castes. The southern segment is the residential unit of the 'clean' castes including the Brahmins. The former segment is enumerated by the villagers as the '*Adivasi para*' (hamlet of the tribes) for their numerical preponderance in the segment and the latter one is called '*Bangali para*' (hamlet of the Bengalee).

The compositions of the castes and the tribes that constitute *Kotaigarh* village community are given in the table 2, according to their numerical strength. Thus in the village, seventythree Brahmins, six hundred and ninetythree non-Brahmins and four hundred and fiftythree tribes have been witnessing the draught and pains of poverty as well as nature's blessings and good harvest.

TABLE 2  
The caste and tribe composition of *Kotaigarh* village

| Name of caste/tribe               | No. of family | Population |        |       | Ritual purity division |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|------------|--------|-------|------------------------|
|                                   |               | Male       | Female | Total |                        |
| Bhumija (Peasant)                 | 56            | 160        | 161    | 321   | Ad                     |
| Mahisya (Cultivator)              | 33            | 109        | 81     | 190   | cl                     |
| Kayastha (Scribe)                 | 23            | 82         | 63     | 145   | cl                     |
| Mahali (Basket maker)             | 24            | 64         | 68     | 132   | Ad                     |
| Solanki (Cultivator)              | 17            | 56         | 40     | 96    | cl                     |
| Sadgop (Land holder)              | 13            | 45         | 32     | 77    | cl                     |
| Brahman (Priest and Scholar)      | 11            | 36         | 37     | 73    | cl                     |
| Napit (Barber)                    | 7             | 18         | 13     | 31    | cl                     |
| Kaibarta (Fisherman)              | 6             | 13         | 13     | 26    | unc                    |
| Kumhar (Potter)                   | 5             | 12         | 9      | 21    | cl                     |
| Tambuli (Trader)                  | 2             | 14         | 7      | 21    | cl                     |
| Baisnab (Religious mendicant)     | 3             | 8          | 12     | 20    | cl                     |
| Hadi (Sweeper)                    | 2             | 10         | 10     | 20    | unt                    |
| Tanti (Weaver)                    | 3             | 7          | 8      | 15    | unc                    |
| Chatri (Businessman)              | 1             | 5          | 4      | 9     | cl                     |
| Dhopa (Washerman)                 | 1             | 4          | 5      | 9     | unc                    |
| Moira (Confectioner)              | 2             | 2          | 4      | 6     | cl                     |
| Kamar (Blacksmith)                | 1             | 3          | 2      | 5     | cl                     |
| Muchi (Tanner and leather worker) | 1             | 1          | 1      | 2     | unt                    |
| Total                             |               | 211        | 649    | 570   | 1,219                  |

Abbreviations : Ad = Adivasis; cl = 'ritually clean' castes  
 unc = 'ritually unclean' castes;  
 unt = 'ritually untouchable' castes.

'Paddy cultivation' forms the main gamut of villagers' activity. The introduction of industrial goods in the village and their circulation among the villagers through village shops, weekly market and market of the nearest towns are bringing the artisan castes toward 'paddy cultivation', the servicing castes like bar-

ber, washerman find their occupations non-remunerative for the existence of saloon and laundry in the places within easy communication. Even though the barbers want to provide the regular services to the villagers in the market where they take seat under a tree and shave the adults. Therefore, main concentration of earning has been transferred to 'paddy cultivation'. Payment of services of any kind, business transaction, capital formation or wealth accumulation are inversely dependent on paddy. The whole villagers regardless of their affiliation to a caste or a tribe take part in 'paddy cultivation' mainly in four ways : owner-supervisor (owner of lands but not tiller), owner-cultivator (owner and tiller), tenant (share-cropper) and labourer. Ownership of land divides the people mainly into two classes : the land-owner and the landless. In *Kotaigarh* one notable feature is the dispersed land distribution. The land is held by almost all the castes and tribes but not equally and substantially. Therefore, land possessor is numerically more in the village than the landless. When the amount of holding is considered, it is noted that the considerable section of the possessors only hold negligible amount when one can ignore them as landowners and consider them virtually as landless in *capital* sense.

However, the market in the village attracts the people from all corners, active network of trade through which a fair flow of goods and services occurs and a sizeable population both within and outside the village draws their living in some ways or other. The market exists in two forms : the bi-weekly market or *hat* where inflow and outflow of goods occur in Monday and Thursday through the temporary and permanent shops, and the 'regular market' in the form of permanent shops on the market site. The consumer goods are flowed in and the paddy crops are flowed out conceivably from the village.

There is an eye-striking growth of political consciousness. Many political parties impregnate their political ideology in the minds of the villagers, for instance, Marxist Communist party of India, *Naba Congress*, *Sangathani Congress* and the like. The supporters of party leaders, youth groups, panchayet members, religious association, teachers' association and influential village elders are engaged in overpowering each other. Thus, the students, teachers, cultivators, shopowners, professionals and village leaders make the village hyperactive.

The leaning of entire range of castes and tribes towards 'paddy cultivation' brings the peasants into much competition for land. This also engenders constant mental pressure on the people for searching of lands. The cultivating castes like the Sadgop and the Mahisya have been shunning the ploughing. As a result a new owner-supervisor category or *class* has been emerged. The villagers generally emphasise paddy cultivation though a few of them raise *rabi* crops as well as cash crops like wheat, maize, sugar-cane, mustard seeds, potato, pulses and jute as subsidiary to paddy cultivation. Vegetables of different varieties are also raised by many. The sizeable landowners invest the capital for the same, earned out of surplus paddy. In case of marginal cultivators the raising of *rabi* or cash crops depend on the financial assistances of the village moneylenders. The *rabi* or cash crop and the vegetables come into the market when production reaches the level beyond household consumption.

I encounter six categories of people in 'paddy cultivation' enterprises : owner-supervisors (*Mahajan* or *Malik*), those who employ labourers in their lands for raising paddy; ownercultivators, (*Chasi*), those who cultivate paddy by themselves; tenants (*Bhagchasi*), who cultivate others land in terms of equal share of paddy with the landowner after harvest; contract cultivators (*Sanja chasi*) those who cultivate others lands on fixed share of crops agreed upon previously; day-labourers (*Din majur*), do the job of cultivation on others land on daily-payment basis; contractual labourers (*Baramasi majur*) who cultivate others lands throughout the season on fixed term of payment settled previously. Besides, there are other categories determined by one's occupation : basket-traders (*Jhuri Mahajan*) deal with the baskets which the betel-leaf dealers use for packing betel leaves; businessmen (*Vyabasayi*) who open-up shops of clothes, tobacco, grocery, sweetmeat, coal, tea-stall, stationery goods, ration shop, transistor sets, hardware and so on; artisans and craftsmen like potter (*Kumhar*), blacksmith (*Kamar*), carpenter (*Chhutor*), weaver (*Tanti*), basket-makers (*Mahali*), servicing castes such as barber (*Napit*), washerman (*Dhopa*), midwife (*Hadi*) and tanner (*Muchi*).

However, the *surplus* from the 'paddy cultivation is invested in small-scale business and trade by the sizeable landowning castes viz. the Sadgop, the Mahisya, the Tambuli and others.

The small-scale business and trading have been suffering from good deal of commercial jealousy, mutual disrespect and competition among themselves. These have been engendered by the *status* drive among them. The section of sizeable landowners, for instance, the Brahman, the Sadgop, the Mahisya, the Tam-buli have entered into the new enterprises, like small-scale business and trade for greater occupational prestige and economic supremacy and in fact they are the influential members of the village. The *Bhagchasi* (share-cropper), the *Sanja chasi* (contract cultivator), the *Din majur* (day labourer) and the *Bara-masi majur* (seasonal or contractual labourer) whose numerical position is very high in the village, still play a *passive* role.

*Kotaigarh* is now entering gradually into the stage of market-economy. The supply of the potter and the weaver has been replaced by the village shops. Regular services of the barber, blacksmith have been supplemented by the market. Consumer goods, vegetables, grocery, in sum, commodities of many kinds are available in the market both by payment in terms of money and in kind though latter is less favoured. More the landowners bring their surplus in business and trading enterprises more and more the agricultural labourers and the tenants are drawn toward market oriented economy. Transaction in kind is becoming obsolete and the businessmen and the traders are coming into the competition among themselves. Thus gradual shift of their concentration toward business and trade, drive them away from the participation in paddy cultivation which ensures influx of tenants in their lands. It seems to me that the investment of the sizeable landowners in business and trade insists them to rely on the tenants or contract cultivators.

#### BENAPUR : A BURDWAN VILLAGE

*Benapur*, is a village of slightly different caste composition. It is located in Memari Police station of Burdwan district. The village is approachable on foot from the Debipur Railway station in the Howrah-Burdwan Main line in South-eastern railway tract. Debipur is a tiny railway station and is about sixty miles east of Calcutta. From this station a mud road traverses straight to Grand Trunk Road at a distance of half a mile north. Far towards north from the Grand Trunk Road, a mud road of eight

feet wide takes the wavy course through a few villages and reaches *Benapur* at a distance of four miles. The people of *Benapur* maintains their link with the nearest town by buses, ply along Grand Trunk Road and local train services from Debipur railway station. Pandua, a commercial semi-town and Burdwan, an industrial town are located within fifteen to twenty miles from *Benapur*. Three persons of Brahman caste perform their official services at Pandua, Burdwan and Debipur and take the trouble of going to the job daily from *Benapur*.

*Benapur* is a nucleated village and the village is encircled by paddy fields and chain of villages. In the month of July-August when *Benapur* is seen, from a distance it seems to be submerged under the green foliages of native trees in the midst of green paddy fields. The common trees are the banyan, tamarind, mango, bamboo grove, acasia, wood-apple, guava, palmyra-palm, date-palm etc. These rich varieties of trees cover the whole village from its periphery to the centre and offer the villagers both timber, fuel and fruit.

The setting of the hut is agglomerated. The huts are typical with mud-built wall, straw-thatched or tin roofs. The poorer low castes and tribe scarcely keep windows in their huts. A brick-built house with its broken boundary walls keeps even today, the witness of zemindarship. The descendants of the former Kayastha zemindar still now reside in this house and look after the lands in their possession at present.

The village is segmented into number of *Paras* (hamlets) : *Dule-para*, *Bagdi-para*, *Bauri-para*, *Saotal-para*, *Musalman-para*, *Majher-para*, *Pub-para* and *Paschum-para*. Each *para* is the residential unit of the particular castes or communities. The *para* name is given according to the geographical location of the settlement, as well as the name of the numerically dominant residential castes, for instance, *Pub-para*, is the settlement of the east (*Pub*), *Paschim-para* is the settlement of the west (*Paschim*) and *Majher-para* is the settlement in the middle (*Majher*) of the village. Each geographical location of the settlement is again named according to the name of the numerically dominant residential caste, for instance, *Dule-para* is mainly the residential unit of the Dule (manual worker) caste. *Bauri-para* is mainly inhabited by the Bauri (manual worker) caste. Likewise *Bagdi-para*, *Saotal-para* and *Musalmana-para* are the residential units

of the Bauri caste, the Santal tribe and the Muslim community respectively.

Two temples of *Lord siva* and two *Shyamsundar* (*Lord Krishna*) temples, one *Sitala* (Goddess of epidemic) shrine bring people of all castes for offering their oblation to the Gods and Goddesses. The lower or *jalachal* (from whose hands water is not acceptable to upper castes) castes do not offer pieced fruits like their *jalchal* (water acceptable) counterpart. There is a small forest (*Munish bon*) to one mile east of the village. This forest is about eleven or twelve acres in area. This forest also supplies fuel and food to the lower castes and tribes of the village. There is an Upper primary school in western sector of the village near the eastern boundary of *Saotal-para*. Two teachers teach in the school and they come from other two adjacent villages.

A Kayastha doctor of the village treats the village patient with commercial medicines and his dispensary in the village serves the villagers irrespective of castes and creeds.

There is no open market (*hat*) place in the village. The surplus commodities locally produced are sold to the villagers either through village shops or by peddling. The shops are scatteredly located in the village. There are six shops of grocery and other useful commodities. The villagers sometimes, specially on festive occasion procure commodities from Debipur daily market. Besides, the bi-weekly market at Kulingram village at a distance of two and half miles north, meets up the requirements of the *Benapur* villagers. Therefore, the presence of village shops, Debipur market and bi-weekly market of Kulingram have been drawing the *Benapur* villagers slowly toward market-oriented economy.

The village is the inhabitance of 141 households. There are 98 Hindu, 25 *Adivasi* (tribe) and 18 *Musalmans* (Muslim) households. The Hindus are divided into number of *jatis* or castes and they are categorised into *Jalchal* (water acceptable), *Jalachal* (water not acceptable) as well as into *Bhadralok* (gentry) and *Chotolok* (peasantry) groups. The *Adivasis* are segmented into number of clans and the *Musalmans* have neither caste nor clan divisions at *Benapur*. The caste and the community composition and the status group aggregates are shown in table 3.

*Benapur* is less market oriented than *Kotaigarh* and most of the people are engaged in 'paddy cultivation'. Besides, *rabi* crops and cash crops are raised by some farmers. The payment of services and renting of paddy lands for money are less common than *Kotaigarh*. Next to agriculture, shopkeeping and white-collar jobs and profession are other occupations, mainly of the *Bhadraloks*. Oil-pressing, hair-cutting, sweeping and midwifery etc. are

TABLE 3  
Status group aggregate, caste and community composition  
at *Benapur* village

| Status group aggregate | Caste/Community | Traditional occupation | No. of individual |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Bhadralok</i>       | Brahman         | Priest and scholar     | 83                |
|                        | Kayastha        | Scribe                 | 59                |
| Sub total              |                 |                        |                   |
| <i>Ambiguous</i>       | Bostom          | Religious mendicant    | 5                 |
| <i>Nichujati</i>       | Sekra           | Goldsmith              | 55                |
|                        | Kalu            | Oil-presser            | 7                 |
|                        | Dhopa           | Washerman              | 16                |
|                        | Hadi            | Sweeper and midwife    | 9                 |
|                        | Bagdi           | Agricultural labourer  | 3                 |
|                        | Bauri           | Agricultural labourer  | 101               |
|                        | Dule            | Agricultural labourer  | 215               |
| Sub total              |                 |                        |                   |
| <i>Adivasi</i>         | Santal          | Cultivator             | 142               |
| <i>Musalmana</i>       | Sheik           | Cultivator             | 98                |
| Grand total            |                 |                        |                   |
|                        |                 |                        |                   |

Note : The Bostom have ambiguous position in the village. They are excluded from the *Bhadralok* status and have managed to come outside the *Nichujati* group. But I have enumerated them as sanskritised *Nichujati* who are in search of better but separate status in the village. Throughout the study I have included them with in the *Nichujati* group.

subsidiary occupations of a Kalu (Oil-presser), a Dule (menial) and all the Hadi (sweeper) families respectively. For artisan commodities and blacksmithy work the village has to depend on the near-by villages. Moreover, there is no common barber and priest for ritual services of all the castes of the same category. For performing ritual services, the barber and the priest come from other villages. The Sekra (goldsmith) and the Dule (menial) castes have separate priests and they come from other villages. Likewise, separate barbers lend the ritual services of the *sekra*, the *Dule* and the *Bhadraloks*.

*Benapur* villagers utilised 166.04 acres of lands for paddy cultivation in 1974. Land is the main source of living in *Benapur*. The major amount of land is under the control of *Bhadraloks*. They possess nearly 79.66 acres of lands out of 166.04 acres of cultivated village lands. This means per household holding stands to 4.73 acres. The next good land holding group is the *Musalmanas*. They hold per household 1.90 acres. The *Adivasi* and the *Nichujati* are mostly landless and work on the lands of the *Bhadraloks*. The *Bhadraloks* are owner supervisors. The *Adivasis*, the *Nichujati*, and a few families of *Musalmanas* take part in 'paddy cultivation' either as day-labourer (*Chhut krisan*) on daily payment basis or as contractual labourer (*Nagare*) on fixed payment, settled previously for the season. Besides, share-cropping (*Bhagchas*) is a common system of paddy cultivation in *Benapur*. The *Bhadralok* shopowners, servicemen and doctor, those who have sizeable lands and some *Musalmanas* of good land-holding, appoint share-croppers (*Bhagchasi* or *Bhag krishans*). The crop is divided between the share-cropper and the landowner equally after harvest. The seed and the labour are provided by the share-croppers. The *Bhadralok* elders are the influential heads of the village and control the village affairs. The *Nichujatis*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas* perform the passive role.

The *Benapur* has council of village elders represented mainly by the *Bhadralok* in which representatives of the different *Nichujatis*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas* are found to place their comments on matters of their own castes or groups though verdict mainly depend on the decision of the *Bhadralok* elders. Besides, there exist the village Panchayat (*Gram Sabha*), tribal council and the council of the *Musalmanas*. There are two major political parties that regulate the minds of the villagers : the Marxist

Communist party and Congress. The former convinces most of the minds of the people of non-*Bhadralok* category and these people take into account the outlook and strategy of the Marxist Communist party though sometimes falteringly.

*Benapur* is slowly enriching by the forces of modernisation. The earning of the people though mainly rests on paddy cultivation, the leaning of the people toward new enterprises is not absent. The *Bhadraloks*, specially, have taken white-collar jobs and profession and a few have opened up grocers' shops in the village. A *Kalu* (Oil-presser), a *Dule* (menial) and a *Musalmana* (cultivator) also have opened up grocers' shops in the village. The nearby markets at Debipur, Kulingram, Pandua, Burdwan are gradually pouring industrial goods to the village. The village shops only are adding more assistance to it. On the other side a *Dule*, has been recruited by the villagers to serve as barber. He renders the regular services to all the villagers. But for ritual services there are separate barbers for some castes. This indicates that the *Benapur* villagers are gradually loosening up the caste proscription and tend to move away from caste-bound occupation and very slowly towards market-oriented economy. Thus features of traditional and modern, industrial and non-industrial urban and rural lives are visualised through the framework of *Benapur*.

### CHAPTER III

#### CASTE AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY : A CASE OF KOTAIGARH

There are seventeen castes and two tribal groups in *Kotaigarh*. The Hindu villagers reckon themselves by *jati* (caste) name. The tribal villagers introduce them by *Adivasi* (tribe) name. There is a social hierarchy in the village and each caste and tribe have specific position in the rung of the hierarchical ladder (Sengupta, 1969, pp. 70-78). The rung of the caste or the tribe is determined on number of dimensions.

There are considerable controversies existing among different scholars and they retain diverse opinions in determining the hierarchy. Purity and pollution concept is discussed critically by Stevenson (1954, pp. 45-65) and he subscribes that the secular status is derived from skill, education, wealth, land-ownership, economic lines of demarcation in occupation ; and *ritual status* is derived from behaviour patterns associated with mystical belief which is subservient to the Hindu pollution concept. Stevenson also states that the *ritual status* of a group is mainly based on two principles. These are (a) the observance of certain standardised codes of behaviour in context of occupation, diet and marriage rules with reference to pollution concept and (b) the rights to perform certain rites, the most important of which is the orthodox initiation rite or *Upanayana*. Stevenson's statements run in conformity with Manu's *Dharmashastra*, where Manu puts stress on the concept of purity in occupation, diet, marriage rules and other important rituals and prescribes a standardised codes of behaviour, ought to be followed by each of the four ranked '*Varnas*', deviation from which leads to rise and fall in the rank (Marriott, 1959, p. 93), Srinivas (1955, p. 26) observes caste hierarchy in *Rampura* village which he links up, with dietary habits and occupation, although influences of local factors are there. He asserts that hierarchy is dynamic in nature, and numerical strength of a caste, amount of landholding are not the only factors for the rise in status. The actual

occupation locally pursued and extent of *sanskritisation* are also important regulating factors of hierarchy. Dube (1955a, p. 187) concludes that the ritual purity and pollution are the main plank on which the status evaluation and ranking depend. In general, the castes which strictly maintain ritual purity are ranked high than the castes commonly less rigid in maintaining it. He believes that number of factors are linked with it such as daily rituals (*purificatory bath*), superiority of diet (vegetable diet is superior to non-vegetarian diet) and hierarchy of occupation. Mayer (1956, p. 120) puts emphasis on the activities in which a particular caste engages rather than symbolisation of the activity. He asserts that the ritual status is principally expressed in the hierarchy of commensal relations. He also points out the obvious difficulty in establishing a hierarchy on the basis of occupation because many castes are fissioned occupationally and again different castes follow the same profession. Only in minority cases Mayer (1956) looks to the notion of hierarchy on the basis of occupation and for the rest he emphasises secular distinction. For commensal rules he also notes that it is subservient to some controlling factors. The commensal rules cannot be fully considered because the commensality is an activity rather than a symbol. So its application is less precise. Dumont and Pocock (1959, pp. 9-39) subscribes that the hierarchy is based on the pure and impure scale. This scale also regulates the other main features of castes. Dumont (1966) brings forth Bougle's definition of caste society in ascertaining his hierarchical proposition. Dumont (1967, pp. 28-38) considers caste as a structural system. The ideas and values attached to it, cannot be separated from the caste structure. Bougle (1958, pp. 7-30) defined caste society as an aggregate of a number of permanent groups, specialised, hierarchized and separated from each other in relation to marriage rules, food habits and physical contact. Dumont asserts that the common basis of these three features is built around the opposition of purity and impurity. Opposition of hierarchical nature emphasises separation in marriage rules, food habits and physical contact. Separation on the professional level and specialisation of occupation are also relevant to opposition of pure and impure. Dumont believes that caste hierarchy is always associated with some religious functions.

Marriott (1959, pp. 96-97) proposes attributional and interactional theories of caste ranking. Caste-custom, behaviour and attributes like diet (*Pacca* or *Kacha*), occupation, etc. determine caste rank. On the basis of these he postulates attributional theory. By interaction theory he suggests "castes are ranked according to the structure of interaction among them". Marriott finds two types of interaction mainly : (a) the ritualised giving and receiving of foods and (b) giving and receiving of ritual services. The former is regarded as more decisive for establishing caste rank than the latter. The attributional theories he criticises severely on several grounds as attributes of hierarchy, diet and occupation cannot be correlated well with the observed order of caste ranking. For instance, he cites the cases of vegetarian trader of *Rampura* in Mysore; they are slightly ranked lower than the meat eating peasant and sheep-herder. The basket maker and the potter perform non-polluting occupation but are ranked below the castes professing polluting occupation (Srinivas, 1955). The importance of ritual criteria and service relationships in case of ranking is stressed by Gough (1959, pp. 115-116). Social and judicial status are determined in Kerala by service relationship. She means that the inferior owes the superior, his economic and ritual services in return for economic rights and the superior has judicial rights over the inferior to settle his disputes and to penalise him, if he breaks the law. As regards the castes belonging to the same position in judicial hierarchy, the proposed ritual criteria such as marriage rules, the myth of origin and service relationships concerning food and occupations are the determining factors.

These diverse opinions of different scholars, working in different areas, of course show, immutable controversy in determining hierarchy and obvious difficulty involves in the task. No attempt of determining caste ranking is uncriticisable and non-arguable and as such unexcusably faultless. The determination of each rank of a caste or even the approximate position of it in hierarchical ladder is difficult for the *nebulousness* of hierarchy. But this is not an absolutely impossible task. With the understanding of its limitation and *nebulous nature*, the stratification of castes at *Kotaigarh* is considered here.

## OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE

## I

Among many features, association with occupation is one of the characteristics of the caste. Many castes are called by the name of the profession which in general, they follow (Senart, 1930, p. 33). In many cases the caste names at *Kotaigarh* are expressed in terms of their occupations, for instance, the Kumhar (Potter), the Kamar (Blacksmith), the Napit (Barber), the Tanti (Weaver), the Dhopa (Washerman) and so on. The caste occasionally splits up into sections under geographical names e.g. the Agarwals, the Oswals and others and maintain rigid endogamy among themselves (Senart, 1930, p. 33). In certain region of India, the caste usually adds the name of the region as prefix of the caste name such as Gujrati Chamar, Malwai-Chamar, and Desha-Chamar (Mathur, 1964, p. 146). Risley shows the similar divisions among the Bauri caste as an example of identical nature. The name Dhula-Bauri and Mula-Bauri are the divisions of the Bauri caste according to geographical residence (Risley, 1892, p. 78) of the caste.

Risley in defining the caste concludes that the caste member professes a common hereditary occupation. He asserts the occupation of priesthood to the Brahmins, working in leather to the Chamar and the Muchi, the work of scavenger to the Dom and the Bhangi (Risley, 1915, p. 76). Mathur (1964, p. 146) objects to this system of identification of castes on the basis of hereditary calling. He sets the example of reckoning the people by the name of the trade for instance the Bharafwala (ice-seller), the Baniya (shop-keeper) etc. He argues that all social relations and shop-keepers do not as a group member have with one another are patterned by the rules of the endogamous nature. The castes under different trades' names consist of people of different castes (Nesfield, 1885, p. 62; Ibbetson, 1883, p. 366). Again Nesfield explains in his studies that professional distinction among the merchants is almost absent. It is evident that the members of a caste may change their occupations without leaving the caste (Nesfield, 1885, pp. 78, 81). Senart (1930, p. 37) argues, summing up the reports on the castes by Nesfield and Ibbetson that the speciality and hereditary occupation have

not only been a powerful bond within the caste but have often been the centre of attraction.

Risley, Blunt and Hutton mentioned about the fissiparous nature of the caste to show that change of occupation by a section of the caste members brings about, in course of time, changes in social and ritual performances. Gradually this enlightened section breaks away from the parent group and forms a new endogamous group developing its own tradition and ways of social action (Risley, 1915, p. 270 ; Hutton, 1951, p. 51 and Blunt, 1931, pp. 229-252).

It is observed that at *Kotaigarh*, the association of the castes and the traditional occupation is generally reflected in the castes' names only in certain cases such as the artisan and the servicing castes. This link between the occupation and the caste name is universally known as it is established by tradition. But there are certain castes whose names do not show association with any specific occupation. In *Kotaigarh* the castes, such as, the Sadgops, the Solankis (previously known as Sukli), the Chhatis and the Mahalis do not show any association with particular occupation but possess and pursue a traditional calling. The Sadgops and the Solankis are the cultivators, the Chhatis are the businessmen and the Mahalis are the basket-makers. The importance of the association of the caste and the occupation is taken by Nesfield as an yard-stick in establishing his theory on the growth of the caste system in India. In Census of India 1881 he classified the castes on the basis of occupation. Common occupation is the foundation of the caste and it is the centre round which it has grown up (Nesfield, 1885, p. 9). Ibbetson also subscribed the idea of guild founded on hereditary occupation (Ibbetson, 1883, p. 341). Dutta (1931, p. 3) in describing the features of the castes mentions that there are fixed occupations for many castes. Guru Prasad Sen (1890, p. 49) in summarising the permanent traits of the caste has left occupation completely out of account.

In recent studies in Indian caste system, this intimate relation of the caste and the occupation is also considered as an important feature. Majumdar (1958, p. 285) asserts this as one of the main planks upon which the social stratification of the castes is based. Many other authors of village studies in India also have mentioned that the caste and the occupation are closely linked up (Srinivas, 1955, pp. 1-2 ; Dube, 1955, pp. 36-37 and

Mayer, 1956, pp. 127-130). The caste's close link is even shown in the myth in Ramkheri, which points out the existence of many castes in one hand and their connection with specific occupations on the other. The occupation is not only traditionally ordained but also religiously linked with the caste (Mayer, 1960, pp. 61-62). The study of Sivapur village ascertains that one is not only born into a caste but also to the occupation which is associated with that caste (Ishwaran, 1966, p. 27). Whatever the popular impression of the relation between caste and occupation, it is not unchangeable at *Kotaigarh*.

At *Kotaigarh* there is a particular occupation for each caste. Each caste happens to follow this occupation in general. Participation in this economic pursuit and practice of this occupation are traditionally ordained. But this does not mean that all the castes and their members or even majority of them follow the traditional calling. In conformity, when some pursue the traditional calling, they also side by side profess other occupations. In contrary, some follow non-traditional occupations when these are much more remunerative than the traditional one. Again many persons have more than one occupation of which the traditional one is primary. These multi-occupational patterns are the outcome of the low-level economy of the village. This makes it necessary for a person to go outside the traditional occupation. The old prejudice and the age old conservatism regarding the hereditary and traditional occupations are no longer considered as guild to a particular castes and one is not bound by tradition to follow this. But in matter of discussions the older generation and the conservative persons always speak in favour of the traditional calling and refer this for the identification of the caste's status.

In traditional village communities in India each takes pride in the skills required for his traditional calling and regards this skill as natural monopoly of the caste. This is not evidenced at *Kotaigarh*. The villagers seldom express their surprise when the barbers of the village show their skills in agriculture than their skills in hair-cutting and shaving. The barbers are the servicing caste and usually assumed not to possess skills in agriculture. In practice the professional barbers of *Kotaigarh* show much skill in agriculture in addition to their natural skill in the works of hair-cutting and shaving.

The flexibility in occupation thus ensures the cleavage in

the caste barrier because the members of almost all the castes are participating in agriculture in some way or other. Besides, some castes' members are opening shops, taking medical profession as quackdoctors, basket trading etc. A few members of the Tambuli and the Kumhar or Potter castes have been attached to the village school as teachers. The barbers have been changing over from shaving and cutting of hair to cultivation. The weavers are practising agriculture with more interest than weaving of clothes. The washerman winds up the job of washing the clothes and participates in agriculture. At *Kotaigarh* the Kairbarttas or fishermen depend not on fishing for their livelihood and all of them have taken to agriculture. One family of potter still follows the traditional calling and prepares wheel-made pottery to sell it in the village and weekly market nearby, though this family participates in agriculture for subsidiary means of earning. The rest of the potters are primarily engaged in agriculture either as owner-cultivator or tenants and agricultural labourers. A few of them also have opened up shops in the village. Though most of the persons in the village are circumstantially forced to supplement their traditional occupations with a side line, the agriculturists of considerable holding and moderate holding seldom feel necessity for secondary sources of income. In their case, of course, they have a secondary occupation in the nature of marketing their surplus paddy. In 'Bisipara', Bailey (1958, p. 96) witnesses an identical scene. "Not every person works at his traditional occupation. The distillers do not touch liquor. The Kond potters do not know how to make pots. The fishermen do not fish. The warriors are cultivators. Even where there is scope for practising an hereditary occupation not all members of the caste engage in the work". Thus one finds at *Kotaigarh* the scope for occupational mobility within the framework of traditional and subsidiary occupations. In certain cases the traditional occupations remain in the nature of subsidiary occupations. In other cases non-traditional occupation takes the nature of subsidiary occupation.

In this respect *Kotaigarh* also offers more than one traditional occupation to certain castes, for instance the big cultivators are not only the producer of paddy they also dispose a portion of paddy in the market i.e. the cultivator is a producer as well as a seller. The potters prepare earthen vessels and also

sell them. The weaver not only makes the clothes but also brings them in the market for sale. The basket makers are the producer of basketry in one hand and supplier of basketry to the trader on the other. Again they bring the baskets in the weekly market for sale. Thus it is seen that the specialised castes perform many operations for the production of their special articles and also for their disposal in the market as well. In brief, the laxity in occupational guild involves occupational mobility and excepting the Moiras and the Chhatris all the castes at *Kotaigarh* from the cultivators to the untouchables commonly practise agriculture.

Occupational prestige is an important dimension. This dimension sometimes works independently and again in certain occasions, it becomes a dependent dimension. The villagers, however, locate the castes or the tribes according to their occupations. The castes have various occupations like those of the tribes. These occupations are of two categories : traditional and non-traditional. The former one, the caste or the tribe owns by birth and the latter one, is achieved not by birth but by skill. Thus occupations are of ascribed and achieved types. The economic pursuits are also of primary or supplementary in nature. This means that *Kotaigarh* has been witnessing the change in caste-centric occupations. Nevertheless, the villagers determine the position of the castes or the tribes by the occupations ascribed to them traditionally. They differentiate the occupations into high and low, pure and impure, clean and unclean, polluting and non-polluting types.

The occupational divisions at *Kotaigarh* were established by introducing movable cards ( $5'' \times 3''$ ) to the informants. Nineteen cards were used for seventeen castes and two tribes. The informants were asked to mention the traditional occupations of the castes and the tribes. They put them accordingly, in the boxes supplied to them being labelled as 'high' and 'low' occupations. They did it according to their own notions. I got an uniform result which exemplifies that the informants had the distinct knowledge about 'high' and 'low' occupations. This sample was used to note the logic behind the notion of the people about hierarchy and subsequently for placing the people in prestige scale.

High and low divisions of traditional occupations of the

castes and the tribes are noted below. There are six high occupations : Priesthood, Scribing, Religious mendication, Landholding, Business and Trading. These are followed respectively by castes like the Brahman, the Kayastha, the Baisnaba (sect), the Sadgop, the Chhatri and the Tambuli. There are eleven other low occupations for instance, bartering by the Napit, pottering by the Kumhar, weaving by the Tanti, blacksmithy by the Kamar, confectioning by the Moira, cultivating of paddy by the Mahisya, the Solanki, the Bhimija, basket making by the Mahali, fishing by the Kaibartta, washing of clothes by the Dhopa, sweepery and midwifery by the Hadi and leather-working by the Muchi.

The prestige scale, when was used to locate the villagers in 'high' and 'low' divisions according to traditional occupations, it was noted that both the tribes had low occupations. Besides, the majority of the castes of the village had low occupations. The informants located the castes and the tribes in 'high' and 'low' occupations, considering their attachment to 'purity' and 'impurity', for instance, the work of the priest, scribing, religious mendication and begging like cereals, pulses, vegetables and non-pieced fruits for the same involve no 'impurity'. Again, landholding, business, and trading are pure economic pursuits. On the contrary, the cutting of hair, shaving of beards and pairing of nails involve 'impurity' as they involve contact with sweat, body emissions and unwanted body parts etc. Pottering is impure work as the potter has occasional contact with filthy things deposited in the earth with which he prepares his commodities. Moreover, he has the physical contact with lower caste persons who spread pollution during bargain and sale of potter's commodity (Sengupta, 1969, pp. 69-70). Weaving is impure occupation because, the weaver use rice gruel (*Mar*) as starch for his cloth. Similarly, blacksmithy involves contact with unclean persons. Confectioner uses sour to make impure the milk to extract caesin for his sweetmeats. Cultivation brings contact with filths in the fields, basket-making involves contact with filthy things in the 'bamboo-grove' from where the basket-makers secure the raw materials of basketry. The villagers generally use the bamboo grove for morning evacuation. Fishing for livelihood is impure occupation, the killing of lives are associated with it. Washing of soiled clothes, sweepery and midwifery are low occupations as they spread 'impurity' through contact with soiled clothes and

filths, umbilical cord and placenta. The clothes washed by the washerman are surely clean than the soiled cloth but not pure enough. Because the washerman uses rice-gruel for ironing the cloth, besides his touch is not pure enough for the Brahmins. They do not wear the cloth washed by the washerman during worship or on ceremonial occasion. The richer Brahman has silk-cloth for worship. This is considered as pollution-proof. The non-Brahman castes like the Kayastha, the Sadgop, the Baisnaba (sect), a few Mahisya families also wear cloth rewashed at home after delivery by the washerman only during worship or any ritual occasion. Handling of dead animals and working on their leather spread impurity. Therefore, the demarcation of 'high' and 'low' occupations is considered from the nature of involvement of the occupations with the 'pure' and 'impure' conditions (Dumont and Pocock, 1959, pp. 3-39).

The informants were further asked to place the cards of each caste or tribe in six separate grades of occupations, viz., *highest, very high, high, low, very low* and *lowest* successively. In this respect, out of the fifteen informants, four informants slightly differed from the general trend which meant that 73.33% agreed unanimously. The extended grades of occupations are given in table 4.

TABLE 4  
Extended grades of occupations

| Grades of occupations | Occupations   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <i>Highest</i>        | Priesthood  |
| <i>Very high</i>      | Scribing, landholding   |
| <i>High</i>           | Religious mendication,<br>Business, trading   |
| <i>Low</i>            | Barbering, pottering, weaving,<br>blacksmithy, confectioning,<br>cultivation, basket-making |
| <i>Very low</i>       | Fishing, washing of clothes   |
| <i>Lowest</i>         | Sweeping and midwifery,<br>leather working  |

The extended grades of occupations signify that the priesthood is the highest occupation. The traditional occupation of the Brahman is "Yajan, Yaajan, Advayan, Advaayan, Dan, Prati-graha" meaning, offering and officiating sacrifice, teaching and studying, giving and receiving of gifts. These activities are very prestigious activities according to Hindu scripture. Next to priesthood, scribing and landholding are *very high* occupations. Scrib- ing is the job of the Kayasthas and this requires good amount of knowledge and education. Landholding as a source of wealth and income is the occupation of the Sadgop. Landholding means possession of wealth. The possessor also can provide services to many persons. This offers prestige to the landholding caste. Religious mendication, business and trading are high occupatons. The former one involves religious preaching and non-provoking begging. Business and trading are associated with capital and therefore prestigious. Barbering, pottering, weaving, blacksmithy, confectioning, cultivation, basket-making are low occupations. All of them are involved with impurity either through direct contact with body emissions and filth or making the pure objects impure. At *Kotaigarh*, the Kayastha and the Sadgop take purifying bath as the barber's touch impures them, especially the Brahman does not touch anything before bath. Any member of the household pour water on him unless he is completely wet. This does not require when he takes bath in pond. The spot where the barber and the members of the aforesaid castes sat for shaving or cutting of hair is smeared with water and cowdung. Cowdung is a purifying agent to the Hindus. The castes like the Mahisyas, the Solankis, the Tambulis and the others are not very particular about bath after shaving. The washerman washes unclean clothes i.e. soiled clothes and his wife also cleans menstrual clothes. The barber and the washerman do not serve the Mahalis, the Bhujijas, the Hadis and the Muchis. There is a degraded barber for them. There are two very low occupations, viz., fishing and washing of clothes, fishing involves not only killing of lives but also spreads impurity by its touch. The sweepery and midwifery and leather working are considered as the lowest of all occupations. It is noted that there is an association between the 'high' and 'low' divisions of occupations and pure and impure qualities of them.

It is further noted that the villagers denote some actions or

TABLE 5  
High-low divisions of occupations and pure-impure qualities of them

| Occupational quality | Occupational divisions |         |           |
|----------------------|------------------------|---------|-----------|
|                      | High No.               | Low No. | Total No. |
| Pure                 | 6                      | 0       | 6         |
| Impure               | 0                      | 11      | 11        |
| Total                | 6                      | 11      | 17        |

possessions as 'pure' and certain substances as 'impure'. The contact with some 'pure' and 'impure' substances are associated with certain occupations and these are the determinants of the prestige of the traditional occupations of the castes or the tribes. Pure (honourable) and impure (non-honourable) grades of certain actions, possessions, substances associated with occupations are recorded.

Pure actions are offering of sacrifice, officiating of sacrifice, giving of gifts, receiving of gifts, teaching and studying of religious texts and shastras, religious mendication, non-provoking begging (*bhiksha*) and curing of diseases. Pure possessions are knowledge, education, wealth and capital. Pure substances are fire, ganges water, water sanctified with sacred basil. Impure actions are extracting of sour in the milk and killing of lives. Impure substances are body emissions, hair, nail, rice-gruel, rice beer, filth, garbage, fish, soiled clothes, umbilical cord, placenta, women after paturition, unclean persons, dead animals, leather, semen, saliva and menstruated-blood.

The 'high' and 'low' divisions of occupations are based on one's contact with pure or impure substances, on the possession of wealth, capital, education, knowledge, and on certain actions. Likewise, the informants also differentiate certain occupations as 'clean' or non-polluting and certain occupations as 'unclean' or 'polluting'. The divisions of occupations into 'clean' and 'unclean' categories are exactly the same like those of the high and low divisions. No contradiction is observed in this respect. But the informants had extended the polluting occupations into three more sub-categories, viz., 'less polluting'; 'much pollut-

TABLE 6

Pure and impure grades of certain actions, possessions, substances associated with occupations.

| Grade         | Actions   | Possessions   | Substances  |
|---------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Pure</b>   |   |   |   |
|               | 1) Offering sacrifice<br>2) Officiating sacrifice<br>3) Giving gifts<br>4) Receiving gifts<br>5) Teaching<br>6) Studying<br>7) Religious mendication<br>8) Non-provoking begging<br>9) Curing of diseases | 1) Knowledge<br>2) Education<br>3) Wealth<br>4) Capital | 1) Fire<br>2) Ganges water<br>3) Water sanctified with sacred basil   |
| <b>Impure</b> |   |   |   |
|               | 1) Extracting of sour in the milk<br>2) Killing of lives  |   | 1) Body emissions<br>2) Hair, 3) Nail<br>4) Rice-gruel<br>5) Rice-beer<br>6) Filth<br>8) Garbage<br>8) Fish<br>9) Soiled clothes<br>10) Umbilical cord<br>11) Placenta<br>12) Women after parturition<br>13) Unclean persons<br>14) Dead animals<br>15) Leather<br>16) Semen<br>17) Saliva<br>18) Menstruated-blood |

ing' and 'highly polluting'. Sub-categories of 'polluting traditional occupations' are mentioned below.

The less polluting occupations are barbering, pottering, weaving, blacksmithy, confectioning, cultivation and basket-making. The much polluting occupations are fishing for livelihood and washing of clothes. The highly polluting occupations are sweepery and midwifery and leather-working.

The principle of this division of 'polluting' occupations depends on the amount of pollution spreads through contact of certain substances and on some actions in course of earning livelihood. The less polluting substances are filth present in the earth or the place wherefrom the potter draws raw materials for his commodity; body sweat, cut-hair, pared-off nails with which the barbar comes in contact; *Mar* or rice-gruel, which the Tanti uses for starching the clothes; 'unclean' persons with whom the blacksmith bargains and deals with for commodity and service; garbage and other filth in the agricultural fields with which the cultivators have contact in course of agricultural operation; and filth in the bamboo grove. The 'less polluting' action is extracting lemon or sour in the milk to draw caesin from it. Fishing for livelihood and washing of clothes are 'much polluting' actions. Nevertheless, soiled clothes, umbilical cord, placenta, women after parturition, dead animals, hides are 'highly polluting' substances. Sweeping of the garbages in the village street and cleaning of leaf-plates after feast are 'highly polluting' actions.

However, there is a close association between 'less polluting', 'much polluting' and 'highly polluting' sub-categories and the 'low', 'very low' and 'lowest' grades of occupations.

The hereditary association of a caste with an occupation has been so striking that it has occasionally been argued that caste is nothing more than the systematization of occupational differentiation (Srinivas, 1965, p. 506). I encountered that each caste of *Kotaigarh* was not fixed exclusively to its traditional occupation. Excepting the *Moira* (Confectioners), and the *Chhatri* (Businessmen) castes, all castes and tribes practise agriculture. Some members of certain castes profess their traditional occupation in addition to agriculture. Traditionally agriculture was a common occupation of all castes. Therefore, to associate a caste invariably with a single occupation is an oversimplification (Srinivas, 1965, p. 507).

To keep in mind the comment of Srinivas, I considered the present occupational prestige. The present occupation of the villagers are tabulated in the table 7. Both the primary and secondary occupations are shown to provide an idea on the degree of shift from traditional occupations and to note the attachment of the castes to 'paddy cultivation' pursuit. Occupational prestige was determined by high and low divisions from the informants, exactly in the similar way which was followed in cases of traditionally associated occupations of the castes or the tribes.

TABLE 7  
Present occupation of the workers

| Types of occupations            | No. of individuals followed<br>the occupations |             |
|---------------------------------|--|-------------|
|                                 | Primarily                                      | Secondarily |
| Priesthood                      | —  | 3           |
| Teaching                        | 4  | 2           |
| Medical practice                | —  | 2           |
| Service                         | —  | 1           |
| Religious mendication           | —  | 1           |
| Business                        | 3  | 1           |
| Post-mastery                    | —  | 6           |
| Revenue collecting (Teshildary) | 1  | —           |
| Watchmanship                    | —  | 1           |
| Confectioning                   | 2  | —           |
| Trading                         | —  | —           |
| Blacksmithy                     | —  | —           |
| Cultivation                     | 122  | 1           |
| Day-labouring                   | 72   | 25          |
| Barbering                       | 3  | 4           |
| Pottering                       | —  | 1           |
| Basket-making                   | 24   | —           |
| Weaving                         | —  | 3           |
| Cloth-washing                   | —  | 1           |
| Fishing                         | —  | 6           |
| Sweeping and midwifery          | —  | 2           |
| Begging                         | 1  | —           |
| Leather-working                 | 1  | —           |

The prestige of occupations, followed by the villagers, at present was determined from fifteen informants. The criteria of evaluating the prestige are many. At first the high and low divisions were questioned and subsequent categorisation of the occupations were established on the basis of the reason stated by the informants. The high and low divisions of present occupations are recorded below in table 8.

TABLE 8  
The high and low divisions of present occupations

| Division | Occupations   |
|----------|---|
| High     | Priesthood, teaching, service, post-mastery, business, cultivation (only landholding), revenue collecting, watchmanship, religious mendication and trading.                               |
| Low      | Confectioning, cultivation (tilling), day-labouring, blacksmithy, sweeping and midwifery, leather-working, begging, fishing, barbering, pottering, weaving, basket-making, cloth-washing. |

High occupations are priesthood, teaching, service, post-mastery, business, cultivation (only handholding), revenue collecting, job of watchman religious mendicants and trading. Low occupations are confectioning, cultivation (tilling), day-labouring, blacksmithy, sweepery and midwifery, leather-working, begging, fishing, barbering, pottering, weaving, basket-making, and cloth-washing.

When the caste and its relation to present occupation are considered, it is noted that in certain cases even the low-caste performs high occupation and the high-caste performs low occupation. To make the statement precise to the reader, the castes and tribes of each workers are cited in the table 9.

Table 9 indicates that a few occupations are still fixed to certain castes and certain others are followed by many castes collectively, for instance, priesthood, religious mendication, confectioning, blacksmithy, pottering, basket-making, barbering weaving, cloth-washing, sweepery and midwifery, and leather-working are restricted to the castes and the tribes who are traditionally

attached to these occupations. These occupations are either primarily or secondarily followed by the Brahman, the Baishnaba, the Moira, the Kamar, the Kumhar, the Mahali, the Napit, the Tanti, the Dhopa, the Hadi and the Muchi respectively. Again, the occupations like teaching, medical practice, business, trading, day-labouring and cultivation are followed together by many castes.

TABLE 9  
Present occupation and the castes or tribes:

| Occupations             | Primarily followed |                     | Secondarily followed |                     |
|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|                         | No. of individual  | Name of caste/tribe | No. of individual    | Name of caste/tribe |
| 1                       | 2                  | 3                   | 4                    | 5                   |
| Priesthood              | —                  | —                   | 3                    | Brahman             |
| Teaching                | 3                  | Tambuli             | 1                    | Kayastha            |
| Medical practice        | 1                  | Mahisya             | 1                    | Sadgop              |
| Service                 | —                  | —                   | 1                    | Kayastha            |
| Religious mendicitation | —                  | —                   | 1                    | Kayastha            |
| Business                | 1                  | Kayastha            | 1                    | Baisnaba            |
|                         | 1                  | Chhatri             | 4                    | Sadgop              |
|                         | 1                  | Solanki             | 1                    | Mahisya             |
| Post-mastery            | —                  | —                   | 1                    | Sadgop              |
| Revenue collecting      | 1                  | Mahisya             | —                    | —                   |
| Watchmanship            | —                  | —                   | 1                    | Kaibartta           |
| Confectioning           | 2                  | Moira               | —                    | —                   |
| Trading                 | —                  | —                   | 1                    | Tambuli             |
| Blacksmithy             | —                  | —                   | 1                    | Mahali              |
| Cultivation             | 11                 | Brahman             | —                    | Kamar               |
|                         | 23                 | Kayastha            | 1                    | Kayastha            |
|                         | 15                 | Sadgop              | —                    | —                   |
|                         | 31                 | Mahisya             | 1                    | Mahisya             |
|                         | 15                 | Solanki             | —                    | —                   |
|                         | 7                  | Kumhar              | —                    | —                   |

TABLE 9 (*Contd.*)

| 1                      | 2  | 3         | 4  | 5         |
|------------------------|----|-----------|----|-----------|
| Cultivation            | 2  | Tambuli   | —  | —         |
|                        | 5  | Kaibartta | —  | —         |
|                        | 4  | Napit     | —  | —         |
|                        | 1  | Kamar     | —  | —         |
|                        | 2  | Baisnaba  | —  | —         |
|                        | 2  | Tanti     | —  | —         |
|                        | 1  | Hadi      | —  | —         |
|                        | 1  | Muchi     | —  | —         |
|                        | 3  | Bhumija   | —  | —         |
|                        | 1  | Kayastha  | —  | —         |
| Day-labouring          | 2  | Mahisya   | 1  | Mahisya   |
|                        | 2  | Baisnaba  | —  | —         |
|                        | 4  | Solanki   | —  | —         |
|                        | 1  | Kaibartta | 1  | Kaibartta |
|                        | 1  | Tanti     | —  | —         |
|                        | 1  | Dhopa     | —  | —         |
|                        | 1  | Hadi      | —  | —         |
|                        | 56 | Bhumija   | —  | —         |
|                        |    |           | 24 | Mahali    |
|                        |    |           | 4  | Napit     |
| Barbering              | 3  | Napit     | 1  | Kumhar    |
| Pottering              | —  | —         | —  | —         |
| Basket-making          | 24 | Mahali    | —  | Tanti     |
| Weaving                | —  | —         | 3  | Dhopa     |
| Cloth washing          | —  | —         | 1  | Kaibartta |
| Fishing                | —  | —         | 6  | Hadi      |
| Sweeping and midwifery | —  | —         | 2  | —         |
| Begging                | 1  | Bhumija   | —  | Muchi     |
| Leather working        | —  | —         | 1  | —         |

Table 9 also signifies that certain traditional occupations of the castes are now continued as a means of *secondary* sources of income; priesthood by the Brahman; religious mendication by the Baisnaba; blacksmithy by the Kamar; pottering by the Kumhar; weaving by the Tanti; cloth-washing by the Dhopa; sweepery by the Hadi. This suggests change in occupation from the ascribed to the achieved one. Further, it is noted that the barbering is

followed primarily by three Napits and secondarily by four Napits. Day-labouring is though followed by many castes and tribes together yet the highest number of individuals follow it as a means of primary occupation, are the Bhumijas. The Mahalis pursue it as a secondary means of earning.

Extended grades of occupations in order of rank are given in table 10. The prestige ranks of six categories have been converted into normal scores. The differences in the order of prestige series equal to 1, the differences between the transmuted 'scores' in the scale of 100 vary considerably. The largest differences are noticed at the end of the series, smallest in the middle. For example, the differences in scores between 'highest' and 'very high' and between the 'very low' and 'lowest' categories are nearly twice the difference between the 'high' and 'low'. If the prestige quality is normally distributed it is nearly two times hard for a given occupation to consider it and to include it from 'very high' to 'highest' category as it is from 'high' to 'low' category. However, the percentile rank of six categories of occupations have been entered for comparison with normal curve scores.

The occupational prestige ranks are separately obtained from the twenty informants and given in table 11. These ranks have been combined and averaged into a single ranking. The prestige ranks of occupations thus obtained have been transmuted into normal curve scores. This is clearly discernible from table 11 that the differences in order of prestige rank equal to 1, the differences between the transmuted scores in the scale 100 vary considerably. The largest differences are found at the end of the rank series, the smallest in the middle. For instance the difference in score between priesthood and teaching or between sweepery and midwifery and leather working is two times and four times the difference between business and post-mastery or between confectioning and blacksmithy. Now, if the prestige rank is normally distributed, it is two times as hard as for a teaching occupation to reach the prestige rank of the priesthood. In transforming the prestige ranks of the occupations into verbal category of occupational prestige, it is noted that the occupation of 'highest' category coincides with the prestige rank 1, of the table 12. But the 'very high' category includes occupations of the prestige ranks, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. Again 'high' category com-

TABLE 10  
Extended grades of occupations in order of rank

| Grades of occupational prestige | Prestige ranks | Occupations   | *Percent position | Scores (scale 100) | **PR |
|---------------------------------|----------------|---|-------------------|--------------------|------|
| Highest                         | 1              | Priesthood  | 8.33              | 77                 | 92   |
| Very high                       | 2              | Teaching<br>Religious mendication,<br>Medical practising,<br>Service,<br>Landholding                    | 25.00             | 63                 | 75   |
| High                            | 3              | Business,<br>Trading<br>Collecting,<br>Watchmanship   | 41.66             | 54                 | 58   |
| Low                             | 4              | Confectioning,<br>Cultivation,<br>Blacksmithy,<br>Barbering,<br>Pottering,<br>Weaving,<br>Basket-making | 58.33             | 46                 | 42   |
| Very low                        | 5              | Day-labouring,<br>Cloth-washing   | 75.00             | 36                 | 25   |
| Lowest                          | 6              | Sweeping and midwifery,<br>Begging,<br>Leather working  | 91.66             | 23                 | 8    |

$$100(R - .5)$$

\*Percent position =  $\frac{100(R - .5)}{N}$  where R = prestige rank of the occupation, N = number of categories ranked.

$$(100R - 50)$$

\*\*Percentile rank (PR) =  $100 - \frac{100}{N}$ .

TABLE 11

Prestige ranks of the occupations with transmuted scores

| Occupations             | Ranks | Percent position | Scores |
|-------------------------|-------|------------------|--------|
| Priesthood              | 1     | 1.92             | 89     |
| Teaching                | 2     | 5.77             | 81     |
| Scribing                | 3     | 9.61             | 76     |
| Medical practising      | 4     | 13.46            | 72     |
| Landholding             | 5     | 17.30            | 69     |
| Service                 | 6     | 21.15            | 66     |
| Religious mendicitation | 7     | 25.00            | 63     |
| Post-mastery            | 8     | 28.84            | 61     |
| Business                | 9     | 32.69            | 59     |
| Trading                 | 10    | 36.53            | 57     |
| Revenue collecting      | 11    | 40.38            | 55     |
| Watchmanship            | 12    | 44.23            | 53     |
| Confectioning           | 13    | 48.07            | 51     |
| Blacksmithy             | 14    | 51.92            | 49     |
| Owner cultivating       | 15    | 55.76            | 47     |
| Share cropping          | 16    | 59.61            | 45     |
| Barbering               | 17    | 63.46            | 43     |
| Pottering               | 18    | 67.30            | 41     |
| Basket-making           | 19    | 71.15            | 39     |
| Weaving                 | 20    | 75.00            | 37     |
| Labouring               | 21    | 78.84            | 35     |
| Fishing                 | 22    | 82.69            | 32     |
| Cloth-washing           | 23    | 86.53            | 28     |
| Begging                 | 24    | 90.38            | 24     |
| Sweeping and midwifery  | 25    | 94.23            | 19     |
| Leather working         | 26    | 98.07            | 11     |

$$100(R - .5)$$

Percent position =  $\frac{100(R - .5)}{N}$  where R = prestige rank of  
 the occupation, N = number of categories ranked.

prises of the occupations of prestige ranks, 9, 10, 11, 12 collectively. Similarly, low category indicates the ranks, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 collectively; very low category includes the ranks 21, 22, 23 and 'lowest' category collectively denotes

the ranks 24, 25, 26. The comparison of the tables 10 and 11, shows that the informants when are asked to place the occupations in prestige ranks, they give the prestige serially but when they arrange the occupations, into 'high' and 'low' divisions, they give equal prestige to certain occupations collectively.

## II

The scholars differ in opinion in considering the uniqueness of the caste-system of India. There are two sets of opinions : (i) it is a unique phenomenon as no true counterpart of it is found elsewhere; (ii) it is not a unique phenomenon because the synonymous phenomenon in slightly different form is seen in other parts of the world. Leach (1959, p. 5) supports the view that caste is a structural phenomenon but he subscribes the view that it is a concept which has world-wide application. He argues that caste denotes a particular species of structural organisation indissolubly linked with what Dumont (1966) rightly insists as a Pan-Indian civilisation.

Weber (Gerth and Mills, 1947, p. 396) points out that caste is peculiarly a Pan-Indian phenomenon with a discussion of caste analogue in non-Indian contexts. Hutton (1963, pp. 40-47) argues that the synonym of this complex institution is found elsewhere but of different nature and Indian caste institution is unique in itself. Both Leach and Hutton are right to think that the caste system is unique socio-cultural phenomenon of India for the reason that the system has taken the shape by the processes which are fundamentally different from the way, the systems of social stratification have come into existence at other points in time elsewhere in the world (Gould, 1971, pp. 3-4).

Childe (1942 and 1951) systematically traced the history of human achievement in sociological sense. In tracing so, he pointed out that in ancient estate society the work had become occupational. Specific skill became recognised which initiated social demarcation among the members of the society rewarding them differentially and treating them differently. Childe speaks of scribes, priests, princes, soldiers and officials like the specialised and formalised occupations of carpenters, potters, blacksmiths. These, therefore, indicated that at one level, the estate system could be conceived as a network of interdependent occupational roles which enhanced production of economic goods and services.

and socio-cultural integration of the estate system itself. Further, there were some roles, viz., roles of carpenters, potters, weavers, blacksmiths, had equal importance and received similar remuneration for work. Market became the important mechanisms for the flow of economic goods and services in the estate system. The importance of the product, importance and rank of the role occupant were determined by the monetary means in the market (Gould, 1971, p. 6). Two factors, monetisation of market and occupationalisation of work brought in, the state differentiation of power and degree of control over economic resources. Wolf (1966, p. 13) spoke of the cultural evolution and pointed out how the control over the means of production was passed from the hands of the producers to the groups who were not the producers.

The ranking of occupational roles reflects the distinction between the producers and those who have control over the producers. There are differences between the producers professing high levels of skill and the producers who rendered manual labour. This liberates freedom to the *elites* to rely on the labour and commodities produced by others, viz. the artisans, the technicians and the menials. The distinction among them was accepted at the early stage of estate system. In India the *elites* have control over the resources of production and the producers, as the rewarding authority of the latter. This brings political power to the *elites*. The artisans and the technicians learn the skill to transfer the resources into objects and products of necessity. The production of essential commodities make them important to the *elites* and other non-*elite* consumers. This enables them to achieve the fortune of better rank. The menials, on the other hand, have no control over the resources and no skill to produce essential commodities. They, as a result, come under the domination of the *elites* and the artisans. This exemplification gives me the idea that the social stratification, even in traditional India is dependent on the occupational roles.

The caste system in India is the outcome of ascriptive occupational hierarchy. The men are allotted to their *jati* (caste) *karma* (work). The men are categorised by the kind of work they perform and ranked according to social 'values' assigned to their work. The social stratification system is shaped by the Brahmins. The nature and degree of its existence have taken the

present shape on their success in applying the body of concepts regarding the religious implications of occupationalised work to the ascriptively hierarchised estate system in India and in associating the concept of occupational differentiation into the domain of religious experience. The caste system is the structural phenomenon of Brahmanical values (Gould, 1971, p. 10). *Jati* is an occupational category. Each member of a family belongs to a *jati* or occupational category within a *varna* framework. The occupational category (*jati*) is considered hereditarily. Within the occupational category, a role occupant performs occupational role. Each occupational category is *sine-quo-non* for the smooth functioning of the society. Therefore, the role occupant obeys the hereditarily ordained code of occupational role to maintain *jati dharma* (code of conduct of the family within the occupational category). Philosophical doctrine encourages one to be rewarded in next birth (*punarjanma*). By performing the function (*karma*) according to one's *dharma* of occupational category, the contact with impurity and defilement can be washed off in the next birth. This is the reward for the obedience towards *dharma*. In the context of occupational conduct, the rank of any role occupant as a member of an occupational category (*jati*) is determined by the amount of his involvement with 'purity' or 'defilement'.

*Jatis* are the occupational categories of two classes : specialist and contra-specialist. The former one comprises of Brahmins and the latter one includes the Dhopa (for washing clothes), Napit (for barbering), Hadi (for sweeping and midwifery), Mu-chi (for tanning and removing dead animals), Tanti (for weaving), and Dom (for cremating the dead body). Wiser (1936), Kolenda (1963), and Gould (1964) studies *jajmani* system. They pointed out that the *jajmani* system is nothing but the economic expression of the social hierarchy and interaction of different occupational categories (*jatis*) in a systematised way. The system is necessary for ensuring functional interdependence to eliminate the nature and sources of defilement. The *jajman* receives the services of the priests and the contra-specialists. The priests act as the constant dispensers of priestly purity and the contra-specialists act as the sustained removers of defilement. Hocart (1950, pp. 48-49) considers the *jajmani* system as a ritual or sacrificial organisation. He explains that ideal way of

life is Lordly or Royal way of life and the *jajmani* service givers have commitment to it. In Hindu metaphysics, the occupation-alisation of work and the stratification of occupational category have been integrated which makes no distinction between economic and religious function. Dumont (1966) rightly asserts that the caste system is fundamentally neither a economic nor a political system but it is built around the opposition of purity and pollution having its root in religion.

Differentiation of castes and hierarchy in India are extremely complicated. The ascriptively developed occupational order is sacralised and the functional differentiation of occupation is extended to the domain of ritual activities. The privileged and the underprivileged, the high and the low castes, the clean and the unclean or the untouchables all are differentiated dichotomy based on sacralisation of occupation. The untouchables accept the supremacy of the high castes. This has been made clear by the contemporary studies on the phenomenon called sanskritisation (Srinivas, 1962) in which low castes endeavour to raise themselves not by rebelling against the caste system but by adopting symbols, rituals and social pretensions of the 'pure' or high castes.

Villages are the bedrock of caste system and Hinduism validates it. In India even today, more than eightyfive percent people live in villages. In cities and industrial settlements, the modernity is not free from the coexistence of traditional 'values' of the villages. Sometimes the traditional 'values' exist with very little modification within the heart of the cities. On the contrary, cities are vastly the concentration of the people who have transplanted the essentials of the villagers' economic and social life to urban setting. The concentration of these people with their fading out traditional value systems in the cosmopolitan set up are the assemblage of diversified cultural products for which they develop opposition to rapid modernisation.

In Indian history, the Brahmins were shown as most favoured groups; they were the '*shastra*' makers and the only literate group who had access to '*Vedas*'; they were the advisers to princes and kings; they were the teachers (*Gurus*) and philosophers; receivers of favours of various kinds from all walks of life (Singer, 1959).

Industrial expansion in India in one hand, has been creating pressure on the occupational categories for shifting towards the

work other than traditional one; on the other hand, it is bringing some occupational categories to the advantageous position because of economic privileges, power and literacy, for ritual status and gainful traditional functions. In industrial expansion, even today the high castes are drawing advantages over those who have less economic security, power and literacy.

Caste can be said to be the process of becoming more and more explicitly adaptive structure, whose functions include the provision of security, solidarity and preferential treatment of groups of people who seek to avoid the logical implications of detailed universalistic discrimination with respect to the competition for jobs and other scarce resources (Gould, 1963, p. 431). This is apparent from the foregoing discussion that the systematisation of the ascriptive principle of differentiating the occupational categories (*jatis*) on the basis of occupational roles has received the ultimate religious expression of the cultural values. Recognition of skill takes ritual expression which initiates the division of labour. Rank is assigned to all occupational behaviour on pollution scale as such the society is divided into number of hereditary groups who perform their separate but interdependent religious and economic functions. Thus, caste is the resultant of such occupational categorisation with systematised cultural values fundamentally of religious expression.

At present the occupational role and role occupant are separate. The work, which was under the control of kinship structure is removed to be placed under the control of industrial structures and occupation is assigned on the basis of ability. The ability is now controlled by the market. Indian societies now are at the 'juncture' and the two principles (caste and class) of stratification are competing. This condition draws the attention towards important properties of both.

#### POWER AS A DIMENSION OF STRATIFICATION

##### I

Power is an important dimension of stratification. The inequalities are visible in castes on the basis of differential distribution of social power. The concept of power and its role in Indian caste system are very complex and perplexing. It is difficult to conceptualise power and to estimate its role in alloca-

ting the rank of the castes in rural West Bengal as this kind of study is awfully undermined in India. Therefore, it seems that the analysis of the concept of social power in Indian caste system is necessary for understanding the role of it in placing the castes of rural West Bengal in the order of stratification. The nature of social power is not only under-emphasised in studying the stratification of castes but also it is not stressed adequately in stratification studies of the western societies. Most of the discussions of power are considered specifically in a political sense rather than sociological context. In sociological sense, the power has attracted almost no attention (MacIver, 1947, p. 458). In studying the stratification of rural West Bengal, I confine myself to explore the *locus* and sources of social power which have considerable roie in placing the castes in differential social *strata* from anthropological standpoint.

The primary basis and locus of power lie in community and society rather than the government and the state. The power which the people of the village under study excercises over one another is not the political power only. There are other kinds of power, viz., economic, financial, judicial power and the like. The political power is only one of several various kinds of power (MacIver 1926 and 1947). Like all other human society in a village society of West Bengal, there are several kinds of power relations. Most of the intergroup relations are the game of power, viz., landowners (*Manib*) excercises power over his agricultural servants (*Din-majur* or *Baramasi majur*), creditor (*Mahajan*) over debtor, priest (*Purohit*) over his clients (*jajmans*), landowner (*Manib*) over his tenants (*Bhagchasi*) and so forth.

The caste structure is hierachised on the basis of differential distribution of social 'power' or prestige. The resultant effect of this unequal distribution of prestige leads to perplexing interplay of relative influence, eminence, competence or ability, quality (*Gunas*) knowledge (*Gyan*) dominance, rights, force and authority. It is true that the power is not synonymous with these concepts but these are the resources of power. The differential distribution of prestige initiates inequalities in caste society. Prestige is closely linked up with power. Power is located in prestige. The class or the caste that has the most prestige also has the most power (Ross, 1916, p. 78).

The distribution of prestige shapes the caste stratification.

Further, prestige is the most significant source of social power in the village society of India with its caste components. As one of the significant factors it separates one caste from the other. Prestige is the group attribute in caste society rather than individual attribute. Individual's prestige lies on his caste prestige even today in rural India. Therefore, prestige is not synonymous to power but locus of power. Both of them are independent variables but affect each other.

The caste structure itself is self-explanatory. It exemplifies that power and prestige are independent variables in many events. The poor temple or domestic priest (*Brahman Purohit*) has prestige but no power in any sociological sense of the word. Further, the village *panchayat* (statutory village self government) members of lower caste category have power but no prestige. Likewise, in *Kotaigarh*, the Kayasthas have considerable prestige but not power. Power, the *Purohit* exercises over his clients (*jajmans*) comes not from his superior knowledge (*Gyan*) of sanskritic rituals (*Dharma*, this is competence and not power) but from his ability to deprive of, his clients from spiritual satisfaction who have no capacity to draw it through the performance of sanskritic rituals by themselves. The knowledge of sanskritic rituals may be denied of; *Purohit's* opinion (influence) in this regard may be underestimated but his power of linking him with spiritual world is never undermined. The *Purohit* has idea of the supernatural world. This idea lies in Hindu philosophical doctrines, of *Dharma* and *Karma* which have locus in the ideological sphere. Power, on the contrary, possessed by a person, or a group or a caste has its locus in the sociological sphere. The dominant caste will be a misappropriation if it is considered as the powerful caste. Dominance is a psychological concept but the power is a sociological concept. Power has the locus in groups and it is expressed in terms of intergroup relations and the dominance on the other hand, has its locus in individuals and is expressed in interpersonal relations. Power appears in the statuses which the castes occupy in formal organisation and dominance appears in the roles which the castes play in informal organisation. Even being a member of a powerless caste the dominant individuals can play the roles of dominance, on the contrary, the submissive individuals can play dominant roles if they are the members of the powerful castes. In social situation of *Kotaigarh* the members

of lower caste category acquire an inordinate power in political sense. The category is composed of many underprivileged castes and many individuals have submissive role towards the privileged castes. In reality they join the other members of their group and tacitly oppose the privileged castes together with their group members. This sense of opposition is imposed over them by their leading members.

Power and right are not similar thing in rural West Bengal. Right is distinguishable from power. Right always requires support in the social structure and not always in the laws. In general, privileges, duties, obligations etc. are linked up to statuses both in society and in associations of the society. Right, on the contrary is always associated with the privileges and authority rather than power. Even force and authority are distinguishable from power. Power is a latent force. Force is manifest power and authority is institutionalised power. The role of the land-owner and moneylender (*Mahajan*) belonging to upper caste can be useful to understand this distinction. The control over the means of production itself is the power through which the application of force is possible. The sizeable landowning castes have the power and can threat the bulk of the landless groups to work in their lands for wage. This threat is the power. The social situation is the determinant of power. The power of the land-owners in the village comes from his ability to control the means of production through which they introduce force in social situation of the village in which they live. This situation supports their authority. Power is thus the synthesis of force and authority. Thus authority of appointing labourers for work in the lands or evicting share-croppers from tenancy in the village exercises command or control over the persons in the same village who have no control over the means of production. Power in this particular sense is attached with the statuses not to persons and is wholly institutionalised as authority (Parsons, 1947, p. 152).

There are mainly three sources of power : (i) numerical preponderance of the group members, (ii) organisation and (iii) resources. In most of the societies the support of the majority of the people constitutes the locus of power. The lower castes and tribes instead of their numerical strength have suffered from the domination of the upper castes though they are less in num-

bers. This is because of the unorganised leadership among the lower castes and the tribes and for the lack of resources. In panchayet (village self government based on adult suffrage), it is noted that the power is located in the hands of the numerically stronger group, i.e. the lower castes and the tribes, who can elect or reject the panchayet members. This power of electing or rejecting the candidates is circumscribed by the force and authority of the numerically weaker group through control over the means of production because of unorganised leadership of the numerically stronger group. There, the locus of power though resides in number strength it depends on organised or unorganised leadership. The minority often dominates over the unorganised majority.

The second source of power is the social organisation. The less number of upper caste members of organised minority control large unorganised majority of the lower castes and the tribes. The social organisation regulates the access of the societal members to the resources. The priestly occupation of the Brahman is restricted to the other castes. The tanning and scavenging works of the Muchi and the Hadi are forbidden to upper castes by customary law. The tilling of soil and manual work are considered degrading by the upper castes. In this way, prestige itself is distributed differentially according to the social organisation of tradition. Hence 'resources' constitute the third source of power. There are many resources : money, property, prestige, knowledge, occupation, competence, fraud, sorcery and all kinds of natural resources. There are supernatural resources which are controlled by the Brahman priest, the *Gunni* (sorcerer), and the other specialists (Bierstedt, 1950).

The three sources of social power when are analysed, the power tends to act as one of the important factors which induces inequality among the rural aggregates.

## II

Power allocates one's position in the structure of stratification. There are number of sources from which an individual can derive power. But power in *Kotaigarh* mainly comes from two secular sources in addition to relative less significant other sources : (i) control over land and (ii) support of the preponderating section of the villagers. Ownership of lands stabilises wealth and

control over the people. On the other hand support of the large section of people means getting of leadership. The relationship between power and stratification has been judged by locating the castes or the tribes in stratification order existed in *Kotaigarh*. The castes or the tribes are located in accordance with the amount of power their members gained or enjoyed. More precisely, the positions of castes or tribes are determined according to their position in power structure of the village. To find out the association of power and the position of a caste or a tribe in stratification order two things have been considered. Firstly the different sources of power and the amount of control over these sources by each caste or tribe have been determined. Secondly, the position of a caste or a tribe in the stratification order and the amount of power under the control of each caste or tribe have been noted.

The sources of power are many : Land in the sense of wealth and capital; education, white-collar jobs and business, panchayet membership and ritual purity. The latter one is highly value-loaded and thus even supersedes the power of the highly landed individuals.

*Land and power* : Land is highly valued in *Kotaigarh*. The sizeable landowners control large section of the villagers either letting them lands on share-crop basis or providing services to them in their own lands (Sengupta, 1972, pp. 48-50). Here, I confine myself to find out percentages of landowners and non-owners to measure per household landholding in acres by each caste and tribe and their subsequent position in the hierarchical categories, existed in the village. In finding so, I further note which caste or tribe controls the highest amount of land and its relative position in the stratification order of the village.

In table 12 I tabulated the figure of the total owners and non-owners of lands. It signifies three things : *firstly* there are 32.70% families who are completely landless, *secondly* only two castes possess no lands and *thirdly*, lands are distributed to many castes and tribes. The table does not however, clarifies in any way the relative position of castes or tribes and their ownership of lands. To be more precise, the amount of ownership has been considered to find out a caste or a tribe in stratification order in relation to distribution of lands. The villagers give much value on the quality of lands. At *Kotaigarh*, there are three

TABLE 12  
Landowners and non-owners of lands

| Caste-tribe name | No. of family | Owners of lands | Non-owners of lands | Percentage of non-owners |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Sadgop           | 13            | 13              | —                   | Nil                      |
| Mahisya          | 33            | 32              | 1                   | 3.02                     |
| Solanki          | 17            | 14              | 3                   | 17.65                    |
| Bhumija          | 56            | 14              | 42                  | 75.00                    |
| Brahman          | 11            | 11              | —                   | Nil                      |
| Kayastha         | 23            | 22              | 1                   | 4.35                     |
| Kamar            | 1             | 1               | —                   | Nil                      |
| Kumhar           | 5             | 2               | 3                   | 60.00                    |
| Tanti            | 3             | 3               | —                   | Nil                      |
| Napit            | 7             | 4               | 3                   | 42.86                    |
| Dhopa            | 1             | 1               | —                   | Nil                      |
| Hadi             | 2             | 2               | —                   | Nil                      |
| Mahali           | 24            | 13              | 11                  | 45.83                    |
| Chhatri          | 1             | —               | —                   | 100.00                   |
| Tambuli          | 2             | 2               | —                   | Nil                      |
| Moira            | 2             | —               | 2                   | 100.00                   |
| Muchi            | 1             | 1               | —                   | Nil                      |
| Kaibartta        | 6             | 5               | 1                   | 16.66                    |
| Baisnaba         | 3             | 2               | 1                   | 33.33                    |
| Total            | 211           | 142             | 69                  | 32.70                    |

\*These figures in the table is brought from the table 4, of the book by the author on *Social System of a Bengal Village*, Editions Indian, Calcutta 1973.

types of lands. They are locally known as 'Sol', 'Danga' and 'Bandh' lands. The 'Sol', and the 'Danga' lands are utilised for cultivation of paddy and other crops. The 'Bandh' is non-cultivable land. The 'Sol' land is the wet land and the *Danga* land is the dry land. The wet land is much valued by the villagers. To quantify the amount of land according to its quality the assessment of both the types of lands have been made in table 13. The table indicates that out of 534.82 acres of wet lands, the Mahisya caste owns 109.87 acres. The Sadgop owns 107.00 acres, the Kayastha holds 65.32 acres, the Brahman occupies

TABLE 13  
The landholding by each caste/tribe

| Name of the caste/tribe | Total areas of holding in acres |          | Average areas of holding per family |          |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|----------|
|                         | Wet land                        | Dry land | Wet land                            | Dry land |
| Tambuli                 | 27.00                           | 5.20     | 13.50                               | 2.60     |
| Sadgop                  | 107.00                          | 6.98     | 8.23                                | 0.54     |
| Kumhar                  | 33.00                           | 4.00     | 6.66                                | 0.80     |
| Brahman                 | 64.45                           | 4.67     | 5.86                                | 0.42     |
| Solanki                 | 63.53                           | 9.42     | 3.78                                | 0.55     |
| Mahisya                 | 109.87                          | 13.52    | 3.33                                | 0.41     |
| Baisnaba                | 10.00                           | 2.06     | 3.33                                | 0.68     |
| Kayastha                | 65.32                           | 11.23    | 2.84                                | 0.49     |
| Kaibartta               | 9.36                            | 3.04     | 1.56                                | 0.50     |
| Hadi                    | 3.00                            | 0.30     | 1.50                                | 0.15     |
| Napit                   | 8.00                            | 3.63     | 1.14                                | 0.52     |
| Mahali                  | 13.70                           | 3.17     | 0.57                                | 0.13     |
| Tanti                   | 1.57                            | 0.22     | 0.52                                | 0.07     |
| Kamar                   | 0.52                            | 0.10     | 0.52                                | 0.10     |
| Muchi                   | 0.52                            | 0.10     | 0.52                                | Nil      |
| Bhumija                 | 17.39                           | 4.36     | 0.31                                | 0.08     |
| Chhatri                 | Nil                             | Nil      | Nil                                 | Nil      |
| Moira                   | Nil                             | Nil      | Nil                                 | Nil      |

64.45 acres of lands. But when the caste-wise holding is transmuted into family-wise holding, it is apparent from the table that the Tambuli families hold highest amount of lands. Next to them in order of ownership strength, stands the Sadgops, the Kumhars, the Brahmans, the Solankis, the Mahisya and the like. Therefore, the caste-wise holding and per household holding of a caste or a tribe suggest different picture. This opposition coincides with the position of a caste or a tribe in the stratification order.

Table 14 indicates quantity of wet lands own by each caste or tribe. It further signifies the relation of landownership and caste or tribe hierarchy. If the caste/tribe of the village is mainly divided into two categories i.e., into *high* and *low*, it is noted that the high castes (Brahman, Kayastha, Sadgop, Baisnaba,

TABLE 14  
Community-wise and family-wise landholding and relative  
position of the caste/tribe in village hierarchy

| Verbal categories of rank | Caste/Tribe | Total holding of land in acres | Family-wise ownership in acres |
|---------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Highest                   | Brahman     | 64.45                          | 5.86                           |
| Very high                 | Kayastha    | 65.32                          | 2.84                           |
|                           | Sadgop      | 107.00                         | 8.23                           |
| High                      | Baisnaba    | 10.00                          | 3.33                           |
|                           | Chhatri     | Nil                            | Nil                            |
|                           | Tambuli     | 27.00                          | 13.50                          |
| Low                       | Napit       | 8.00                           | 1.14                           |
|                           | Kumhar      | 33.00                          | 6.66                           |
|                           | Tanti       | 1.57                           | 0.52                           |
|                           | Kamar       | 0.52                           | 0.52                           |
|                           | Moira       | Nil                            | Nil                            |
|                           | Solanki     | 63.53                          | 3.78                           |
|                           | Mahisya     | 109.87                         | 3.33                           |
| Very low                  | Kaibartta   | 9.35                           | 1.56                           |
|                           | Dhopa       | 0.60                           | 0.60                           |
|                           | Hadi        | 3.00                           | 1.50                           |
| Lowest                    | Bhumija     | 17.39                          | 0.31                           |
|                           | Mahali      | 13.70                          | 0.57                           |
|                           | Muchi       | 0.52                           | 0.52                           |

Chhatri, Tambuli) hold 273.77 acres of lands and the low castes (the rest of the castes) and the tribes together hold 261.05 acres of lands. The numerical strength of the families of low castes and tribes is one hundred and fiftyeight and the families of *high* castes is fiftynine only. Therefore, the familywise holding in high caste and low caste categories stands nearly 5.76 acres and 1.65 acres respectively. This clearly indicates that the amount of land is more under the control of the *high* castes. But when extended divisions of hierarchical categories and respective holding by the castes or tribes of each category are

considered, the picture stands differently. Table 15 is cited here to visualise the differences precisely.

Table 15, indicates that the 'highest', 'very high' and 'high' categories own sizeable amount of lands. Further it is noted from the table that the Brahmans altogether own 64.45 acres of lands but when per household holding is considered the quantity of ownership becomes the largest in the village. Thus the ritual purity and land ownership dimensions are consistent in the case of the Brahmans of *Kotaigarh*. Again the Kayasthas and the Sadgops as members of 'very high' category hold collectively 172.32 acres but when per household ownership is noted it falls to 4.79 acres, even lower than the per household ownership of 'high' category which is 5.29 acres. Next to this, the per household ownership falls to 3.44 acres in the castes belonging to the 'low' category. The minimum ownership is noted in the 'lowest' category of castes or tribes which is 0.69 acre. This table indicates that the castes of 'highest' and 'high' categories occupy large amount of lands. But the amount of land ownership is slightly lowered in the castes of 'very high' category because of low holding by the Kayasthas of the village. Again, it is seen that the castes of 'low' category own 216.49 acres of land i.e. highest amount of land is under the control of the castes of this category. But whenever their holding are transmuted into per household ownership, the amount of holding decreases to 3.44 acres. Thus, it may be justified to argue that the per household ownership determines the position in the hierarchy. Greater the ownership, better is the position. Where per household ownership is not effective process, total holding of the caste members of a category is the determinant factor together with the castes' position in the traditional hierarchy and their numerical strength in the village.

Again when one looks at the table 14, it strikes one at once that the Mahisya, the Sadgop, the Kayastha, the Brahman and the Solanki stand in order of holding strength which is sizeable. But the Mahisya and the Solanki belong to the 'low' category, whereas the Brahman, the Kayastha and the Sadgop belong to the 'highest' and 'high' categories of rank. When family-wise holding of each caste or tribe is considered, the Tambuli, the Sadgop, the Kumhar, the Brahman, the Solanki and

the Mahisya stand one after another in order of holding strength. When the position of the caste or tribe is demarcated by high and low divisions, it appears that the position of the Tambuli, the Sadgop, and the Brahman castes is high with their sizeable family holding. The position of the Mahisya and the Solanki is low with their low family holding. The position of the Chhatris and the Moiras are not related to their non-ownership of lands. Again the position of the Kumhar is not altered instead of good holding. Therefore, it is conjectured that the position of a caste or a tribe in the 'high' and 'low' divisions is determined by family holding. Only the Chhatris and the Moiras and the Kumhars do not fit to this conjecture. Their position are determined by other factors like traditional occupations and *style of life*.

TABLE 15  
Verbal category of rank and family-wise holding of  
wet lands in acres

| Verbal category<br>of rank | Caste/Tribe   | Total holding<br>in acres | Family-wise<br>holding in<br>acres |
|----------------------------|---|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Highest                    | Brahman   | 64.45                     | 5.86                               |
| Very high                  | Kayastha,<br>Sadgop   | 172.32                    | 4.79                               |
| High                       | Baisnaba, Chhatri<br>Tambuli                                  | 37.00                     | 5.29                               |
| Low                        | Napit, Kumhar,<br>Tanti, Kamar,<br>Moira, Solanki,<br>Mahisya | 216.49                    | 3.44                               |
| Very low                   | Kaibartta,<br>Dhopa,<br>Hadi                                  | 12.95                     | 1.44                               |
| Lowest                     | Bhumija,<br>Mahali,<br>Muchi                                  | 31.61                     | 0.69                               |

The exact situation of *Kotaigarh* reveals the relation of land and power differently for different castes or tribes, for instance, in high caste categories, the Sadgops exert much power over the villagers because of their good control over 107.00 acres of lands. Similarly, the Brahmans exert power both from land ownership and high ritual status. Here, ritual purity and wealth dimensions are perfectly consistent. The Tambuli acquires as much as 27.00 acres of lands and exerts moderate power owned from control over lands and education shown in table 16. Among the low caste category, the Mahisya has much power because of the numerical strength and sizeable holding of 109.87 acres. Though the Kumhar owns 6.66 acres of land per family yet their numerical position and secular status are considerably low which have precluded them from power structure. Therefore, it is noted that power from ownership of lands is a dependable dimension. In some cases the purity of castes and their control over land and high literacy rate are perfectly consistent. In other castes there are inconsistencies of dimensions.

*Education* : Power comes from education too. Those who are educated can wield much power over the illiterates, barely literate persons exert much influence over the illiterate villagers through their logical explanation of events which the villagers encounter in their community lives. The illiterate villagers often seek help from the educated persons of the village for writing letters, advice in land disputes, marriage deals and the like. In finding the relation between power and education first, I seek to find out the relation between illiteracy and position of the caste or the tribe in the village hierarchy. It has already been stated that the castes or the tribes who possess more lands have greater control over the villagers. Contrary, the castes or tribes who have greater control over the villagers are the powerful castes or tribes of the village. Hence, if the relation between illiteracy and position of the castes or tribes in village hierarchical structure exemplifies that the illiteracy is higher among the castes or tribes whose position in the hierarchy is low, it can be stated that the literacy has a definite relation with power and position. In view of a testing the proposition I cited the figure of literacy of the castes and the tribes of *Kotaigarh* together with the verbal categories of rank in which they belong.

Table 16 reveals that the illiteracy is highest in the castes

or tribes of 'lowest' category. The percentage of illiteracy is slightly lowered in very low category. In other categories the percentage of illiteracy fluctuates in between the castes of the same category, though it is conjectured that the castes of the 'very high', 'high' and 'highest' categories suffer less from illiteracy. If the entire castes and tribes are divided into two broad grades, i.e., high and low, there arise a clear distinction between the two grades with respect to illiteracy. The 'high' castes have nearly 15.83 per cent illiterates whereas the castes and tribes of the 'low' grade have nearly 71.09 per cent illiterates. The percentage in the later, of course, becomes considerably high owing to very high percentage of illiteracy in the castes and tribes of 'lowest' and 'very low' categories.

However, when the extended divisions of verbal rank for the caste or tribe are considered confusion may arise from the figure in the table 16, for instance, illiteracy is low in the castes like the Brahman, the Kayastha, the Sadgop and the Tambuli. But when these four castes are compared the Brahman being the member of 'highest' rank, still suffers from illiteracy of 20.63 per cent, whereas the Kayastha and the Sadgop are the members of the next junior ranks suffer from illiteracy of much low percentage. The Kayastha constitutes 17.07 per cent and the Sadgop 2.89 per cent illiterates. Again, the Tambuli, belongs to lower rank next to the Kayasthas and the Sadgops. But this caste suffers from 5.88 per cent of illiteracy. It is further evident from the table 16 that the matriculation or equivalent standard of education is mostly limited to the castes of 'highest' 'very high' and 'high' categories. Only 3 Mahisya persons, belonging to 'low' caste rank have surpassed the matriculation or equivalent standard.

It appears at first sight that the literacy, power and stratification are not dependent to each other but finer scrutiny proves that they are dependent to each other. When these three are not dependent, other variables are there which juxtapose to determine the position of a caste or a tribe. The table 16 reveals that the Brahmins have more illiterates than the Kayasthas, the Sadgops, the Tambulis and even than Kumhars. This does not bring the Brahmins below the rank of these castes, only because of their illiteracy. The Brahmins are ritually very clean and they wield their power and enjoy highest position because of their

TABLE 16  
Literacy in percentage and the position of caste/tribe in *Kotaigarh*

| Caste/Tribe | Matriculate or equivalent |       |          |       |     |       | Verbal rank |        |           |   |
|-------------|---------------------------|-------|----------|-------|-----|-------|-------------|--------|-----------|---|
|             | Illiterate                |       | Literate |       | No. | %     | Total       |        | No.       | % |
|             | No.                       | %     | No.      | %     |     |       | No.         | %      |           |   |
| 1           | 2                         | 3     | 4        | 5     | 6   | 7     | 8           | 9      | 10        |   |
| Brahman     | 13                        | 20.63 | 49       | 77.77 | 1   | 1.55  | 63          | 100.00 | Highest   |   |
| Kayastha    | 21                        | 17.07 | 101      | 82.11 | 1   | 0.81  | 123         | 100.00 | Very high |   |
| Sadgop      | 2                         | 2.89  | 62       | 89.86 | 5   | 7.25  | 69          | 100.00 |           |   |
| Baisnaba    | 6                         | 40.00 | 9        | 60.00 | —   | —     | 15          | 100.00 | High      |   |
| Chhatri     | 4                         | 40.00 | 6        | 60.00 | —   | —     | 10          | 100.00 |           |   |
| Tambuli     | 1                         | 5.88  | 9        | 52.94 | 7   | 41.17 | 17          | 100.00 |           |   |
| Napit       | 8                         | 34.78 | 15       | 62.21 | —   | —     | 23          | 100.00 | Low       |   |
| Kumhar      | 2                         | 16.66 | 10       | 83.33 | —   | —     | 12          | 100.00 |           |   |
| Tanti       | 8                         | 50.00 | 8        | 50.00 | —   | —     | 16          | 100.00 |           |   |
| Kamar       | 4                         | 80.00 | 1        | 20.00 | —   | —     | 5           | 100.00 |           |   |
| Moira       | 3                         | 60.00 | 2        | 40.00 | —   | —     | 5           | 100.00 |           |   |
| Solanki     | 32                        | 37.21 | 54       | 62.79 | —   | —     | 86          | 100.00 |           |   |
| Mahisya     | 59                        | 54.63 | 46       | 42.59 | 3   | 2.77  | 108         | 100.00 |           |   |

TABLE 16 (*contd.*)

|           | 1   | 2      | 3  | 4     | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8   | 9      | 10       |
|-----------|-----|--------|----|-------|---|---|---|-----|--------|----------|
| Kaibarita | 13  | 43.33  | 17 | 56.67 | — | — | — | 30  | 100.00 | Very low |
| Dhopa     | 3   | 42.86  | 4  | 57.14 | — | — | — | 7   | 100.00 |          |
| Hadi      | 8   | 80.00  | 2  | 20.00 | — | — | — | 10  | 100.00 |          |
| Bhumija   | 245 | 87.50  | 35 | 12.50 | — | — | — | 280 | 100.00 | Lowest   |
| Mahali    | 127 | 91.36  | 12 | 8.63  | — | — | — | 139 | 100.00 |          |
| Muchi     | 2   | 100.00 | —  | —     | — | — | — | 2   | 100.00 |          |

high ritual status. Land and education are subsidiary factors of power and stratification. The Kayasthas, similarly seek power through ritual status and their numerical strength, which is moderate in the village. On the other hand the Sadgops definitely seek power through land and education. The Tambuli because of their low numerical strength cannot exert much power than the Brahmans, the Kayasthas, the Sadgops even instead of their good education and highest per family land ownership. Their traditional occupation of course, puts them down the Brahmans, the Kayasthas and the Sadgops. Again the Mahisyas, wield their power through possession of lands, good education and numerical strength in the village though their position in the village does not go above low category. Their *style of life*, traditional occupation and caste origin are responsible for their low rank in the village hierarchy. Therefore, it is noted that the power is not drawn by all the castes or tribes from the same and similar resources. It depends on the individual case and caste. In some castes the land and education are the decisive sources, for example the Sadgops; in other castes numerical strength and ritual status are the decisive forces, for example, the Kayasthas.

*White collar jobs and power :* With reference to table 9, it can be noted that the occupations like teaching, doctory, service, postmastery, revenue collecting, tax-collecting, business and trading are performed by the members of certain castes or tribes, at present. The informants are asked to place them in the verbal categories of rank with plausible reason. Table 17 indicates that the white-collar jobs, business and trading alter the position of an individual in the stratification order. There exists relation between education and occupation.

Excepting the Mahali trader all persons connected with, white collar jobs, business and trading the either literate, matriculate or have passed the equivalent standard. Only the Kaibartta tax-collector, the Solanki businessman and Mahali trader instead of their non-degrading occupations have not been able to change their position in the village hierarchy. Their positions are determined by their traditional occupations though they do not follow them, at present. Contrary to this, the Mahisya teacher and the revenue collector, because of their occupations and education have been raised to the status of high caste. This is

TABLE 17  
Occupations and caste/tribe rank in the hierarchical structure

| Occupations        | Caste/Tribe of the persons followed occupations |                             | Verbal rank                    | Education                                 |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
|                    | Primarily                                       | Secondarily                 |                                |   |
| 1                  | 2   | 3                           | 4                              | 5   |
| Teaching           | 3、 Tambuli<br>1 Mahisya                         | —<br>1 Kayastha<br>1 Sadgop | High<br>Very high<br>Very high | Matriculate<br>Matriculate<br>Matriculate |
| Doctory            | 1 Sadgop<br>1 Kayastha                          | —<br>—                      | Very high<br>Very high         | Literate<br>Literate                      |
| Service            | 1 Kayastha                                      | —                           | Very high                      | Literate                                  |
| Post-mastery       | 1 Sadgop  | —                           | Very high                      | Matriculate                               |
| Revenue-Collecting | 1 Mahisya                                       | —                           | High                           | Literate                                  |
| Tax Collecting     | 1 Kaibartta                                     | —                           | Very high                      | Literate                                  |

TABLE 17

|          | 1          | 2 | 3          | 4          | 5             |
|----------|------------|---|------------|------------|---------------|
| Business |            |   |            |            |               |
|          | 1 Kayastha |   | —          | Very high  | Literate      |
|          | 1 Chhatri  |   | —          | High       | Literate      |
|          | 1 Solanki  |   | —          | Low        | Literate      |
|          |            |   | 1 Kayastha | Very high  | Literate      |
|          |            |   | 4 Sadgop   | Very high  | 3 Matriculate |
|          |            |   |            | 1 Literate |               |
|          |            |   | 1 Mahisya  | Low        | Literate      |
| Trading  |            |   | —          | High       | Matriculate   |
|          | 1 Tambuli  |   | —          | Lowest     | Illiterate    |
|          | 1 Mahali   |   |            |            |               |

an achieved status. Thus they have changed the status from the status conceded to the caste traditionally. Their position is allocated by their present occupations and education.

In dealing with the occupations and power, it is noted that the white-collar jobs and other self-employment alone cannot alter one's position in the hierarchy. Both education and occupation are interdependent to each other, which means white-collar jobs and self-employment seek power through the correlated factor like education. For instance, the Mahisya teacher and revenue collector have been able to alter their position because of education and prestigious occupations. But the Kaibartta tax-collector, the Solanki businessman and the Mahali trader have been sustained in the same position instead of their non-degrading occupations. The Kaibartta tax-collector have read up to class seven, which seldom impresses the notion of the high caste villagers and his position is determined by the notion of the high castes about him. However, the position of the Kaibartta tax-collector, Mahali trader and the Solanki businessman is still evaluated by their traditional occupations though they are not following them at present. Thus, it is noted that the traditional occupation is still the parameter of one's position in the village hierarchy having its association with low social customs. But when the Kaibartta tax-collector attends the house of any high caste member for tax-collecting he receives congenial attention. This is not observed in other cases. This license of course, is not given to his family members. This difference in behaviour may be of his tax-evaluating and tax-collecting jobs. Similarly, the position of the Solanki businessman is evaluated by the low traditional occupation of land-tilling with low *style of life*. It is observed that the Brahmins buy commodities from his shop and no barrier is imposed in purchasing and selling of commodities either on the buyer or the seller. The position of the Mahali trader is evaluated solely on the *style of life*. "They eat beef and pig, marry their elder brother's widow and sacrifice fowl and pig to their deities". These group attributes are considered to evaluate the position of the Mahali trader. Therefore, it is encountered that the white-collar jobs and non-degrading occupations in some cases determine the position of individuals having their association with education. Some-

times in other cases they are not considered and traditional occupation and *style of life* become the evaluating factors.

*Income or wealth* : Distribution of income has the focal point in the study of stratification. Initially the functional distribution of income was emphasised that is, the division of income among the factors of production. Smith, Ricardo and Marx emphasised the distribution of income among the suppliers of labour, land and capital of different groups in society. Rents, profits and wages were the income of the agricultural proprietors, commercial and industrial entrepreneurs and labourers respectively. But in my studies I put importance to the distribution of income size in terms of individuals and families, as the families being the consumer units. This is possible in rural West Bengal because of the sharp distinctions between different economic categories like castes and agrarian classes. The quantitative studies were possible on the grounds that the data were available from my estimation of income from different families belonging to different castes and tribes. It is difficult to identify directly the social groups with particular types of income. In *Kotaigarh* income units such as clerk, teacher, land tax-collector, doctor, agricultural labourer receive about 80 per cent of their incomes in the form of salaries, visiting or consulting fees and wages. The non-cultivating owners of lands, receive their incomes in the form of rents and for them property incomes are important. The cultivating owners receive their income in the form of profits from the production. The money lenders and shop-keepers receive their incomes in the form of interests and profits.

Inequality in income distribution leading to sharp differentiation is possible even when average income is very low and total range is narrow. The fundamental to the economy of the rural society is not its low average income and its comparatively narrow range but the presence of a well defined income stratification even within small range. The inequality in income distribution and the presence of income stratification naturally suggest a concentration of the income in a sector of a society (Mukherjee, 1971, pp. 134-135). I noted the distribution of income in *Kotaigarh* and it suggests that the relatively high income is concentrated among the families of 'highest', 'very high' and 'high' categories of castes.

Income or wealth has been dealt with as dimension of stratification. Primarily land as wealth has been considered with power dimension. Income is dependent to landholding. Therefore, control over land is directly related to power which one exercises over the villagers. Again landholding tentatively determines one's income. Therefore, income or wealth is considered with power dimension and one can link it in allocating one's position in the social stratification. Other indices of income for example, service, profession, business, money lending and manual work are considered though they are subservient to possession of lands and their utilisation.

The calculation of income of an individual or a family is a most confusing, controversial and inaccurate issue. But it is true, that income or wealth in rural India and in all places determines the position of individuals, families or groups. Therefore, instead of all confusion and obvious difficulty, the income has been calculated to arrive at an approximate estimation of income. I think, it is necessary to give an idea of the methodology what I have adopted to provide data on income for understanding their role in determining the position of families and individuals in stratification order. Income is estimated from main sources : land, service, profession, business, moneylending and manual work. Income of each family is separately estimated and not of individual as family is the consumption unit. The cost of production of agricultural products, investment in business and moneylending have been calculated and the sum is deducted from the gross income to estimate net income. The depreciation cost is also deducted from the gross income too. In few families, income is drawn from the combination of sources as land, business or moneylending or profession and service. The income of those families have been estimated taking the income of all sources. Later on, the income level is determined on the basis of the data on total annual income of a family or families. The income from the service is not difficult to ascertain as the pay is fixed and paid in months. Income from profession is estimated seasonally as it varies with season. Income from business is based on the report of monthly sale and investment. In moneylending, monthly investment is noted and annual return is estimated from the payment of interest. The income from manual work is also noted in different seasons as it varies sea-

sonally and operationwise as well as according to skill, age and sex. The wage rate rises at the time of ploughing, transplanting and harvesting times and in other times it falls. Women do not perform the operation of ploughing, sowing etc. and wage rate of the non-adult workers is less than the adults. However, considering all *proses* and *cones*, it seems to me that the accurate data on income is extremely difficult. Income on many occasions has been noted tentatively and on other occasions has been estimated accurately.

The financial status of the people is indicated by their income. The *per capita* income indicates the distribution of income of the families. I neglected the estimation of *per capita* income as proper equivalents to reduce the difference of age and sex to a unit is not possible in estimation of *per capita* income. Therefore, I have taken the annual income of the families and distribution of the annual income is seen through twelve class-intervals. The distribution of the annual income of all the families under different castes and tribes and verbal categories of the rank are presented in table 18.

It is apparent from the table that nearly 75 per cent families are included within the class intervals of Rs. 701-1000 and Rs. 2801-3300, though the total distribution ranges from Rs. 500 to above Rs. 8000. This indicates that the income is distributed unevenly among the families and the income range is relatively large. The distribution of annual income of the families is considerably asymmetrical. The income is distributed dispersely. This signifies that the families, as a whole, do not form a compact group of similar income. The income though ranges from Rs. 500 to above Rs. 8000, yet more than 57 per cent families is restricted within a small range of Rs. 701 to Rs. 2300. This inequality of income distribution of the families puts one in the enquiry about the type of this unequal distribution.

The caste and the community differentiate the population into different *strata*. The families of *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories of castes mostly draw much income as non-cultivating owners, teachers, doctors, servicemen, moneylenders and as artisans. The low caste families receive income mostly as cultivating owners, weavers and confectioners. The families of *very low* and *lowest* categories draw their income most as agri-

TABLE 18  
Annual income (in rupees) of caste/tribe and verbal categories of rank at Kotaigarh

TABLE 18 (Contd.)

|            | 1         | 2      | 3    | 4     | 5     | 6     | 7     | 8    | 9    | 10   | 11   | 12   | 13   | 14   | 15   |
|------------|-----------|--------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Low        | Tanti     | 3      | 1    | 2     | —     | —     | —     | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |
|            | Moira     | 2      | —    | 1     | 1     | —     | —     | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |
|            | Solanki   | 17     | —    | 2     | 2     | 9     | 3     | 1    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |
|            | Mahisya   | 33     | —    | —     | —     | 3     | 10    | 11   | 3    | 3    | 2    | 1    | —    | —    | —    |
| Very Low   | Kaibartta | 6      | —    | —     | 3     | 2     | 1     | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |
|            | Dhopa     | 1      | —    | 1     | —     | —     | —     | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |
|            | Hadi      | 2      | —    | 1     | 1     | —     | —     | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |
| Lowest     | Bhumija   | 56     | 5    | 28    | 21    | 2     | —     | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |
|            | Mahali    | 24     | —    | —     | 7     | 6     | 7     | 2    | 1    | 1    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |
|            | Muchi     | 1      | —    | —     | 1     | —     | —     | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |
| Total      |           | 211    | 6    | 35    | 38    | 23    | 25    | 19   | 17   | 9    | 8    | 9    | 13   | 9    | 9    |
| Percentage |           | 100.00 | 2.84 | 16.59 | 18.00 | 10.90 | 11.85 | 9.00 | 8.06 | 4.27 | 3.79 | 4.27 | 6.16 | 4.27 | 4.27 |

cultural labourers, basket makers and share-croppers. The income sources above are the indicative of the differential distribution of the income size. This distribution of income size is represented in table 19.

In earlier paragraphs I have stated the particulars on the occupations of the people of *Kotaigarh* at present, it has been noted that the different categories of the castes and the tribes have different sources of earning. In the last paragraph, an idea of these occupations are pointed out. The figure in the table 19 is an abstract of the table 18 and this has been presented for noting the income range of the families in different categories of the caste and the tribe to provide an idea on the relationship between the distribution of income and the ranked categories of the caste and the tribe. The families of *highest* category of caste have income range from Rs. 5,001 to above Rs. 8,000.

The figures in table 19 indicate that the income of the families of *highest* category is above Rs. 5,000. The majority of the families of *very high* category, has income more than Rs. 4,000 and the majority families of *high* category has income above Rs. 1,800 but within Rs. 3,300. So far the *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories are concerned, the distribution of income also suggests that the income declines from the *highest* to *high* categories. If the distribution of income size is considered for other three, like, *low*, *very low* and *lowest* categories, the same trend of decline of income is also noted from *low* to *lowest* categories. In families of *low* categories, income in majority is above Rs. 1,300 but within Rs. 3,300. In *very low* and *lowest* categories majority of the families has income which ranges from Rs. 701 to Rs. 1,300. It is interesting to note that the income range of the *high* and *low* categories has small differentiation and similarly the income range of the *very low* and *lowest* categories has little dispersion. To make the idea precise, the table 20 is put herein for noting the decline and the distribution of income range in different categories.

The percentage distribution of families in different income ranges and categories suggests that the income of the *highest* category, ranges from Rs. 4,001 to Rs. 8,000. The range is small but unequal. Moreover, the families of this *highest* category have relatively high income from other families of different

TABLE 19  
Annual income (in rupees) range of the families in different categories of the castes and the tribes

| Annual income<br>(in rupees) | Family distribution in different verbal categories of rank |           |      |     |          | Total | Percentage<br>total |        |       |
|------------------------------|--|-----------|------|-----|----------|-------|---------------------|--------|-------|
|                              | Highest  | Very high | High | Low | Very low |       |                     |        |       |
| 500 - 700                    | —  | —         | —    | 1   | —        | 5     | 2.84                |        |       |
| 701 - 1000                   | —  | —         | —    | 5   | 2        | 28    | 16.59               |        |       |
| 1001 - 1300                  | —  | —         | 2    | 3   | 4        | 29    | 18.00               |        |       |
| 1301 - 1800                  | —  | —         | 1    | —   | 12       | 2     | 10.90               |        |       |
| 1801 - 2300                  | —  | —         | 2    | 2   | 13       | 1     | 7                   | 25     | 11.85 |
| 2301 - 2800                  | —  | —         | 3    | 2   | 12       | —     | 2                   | 19     | 9.00  |
| 2801 - 3300                  | —  | —         | 3    | 10  | 3        | —     | 1                   | 17     | 8.06  |
| 3301 - 4000                  | —  | —         | 4    | 1   | 3        | —     | 1                   | 9      | 4.27  |
| 4001 - 5000                  | —  | —         | 6    | —   | 2        | —     | —                   | 8      | 3.79  |
| 5001 - 6000                  | —  | 4         | 4    | —   | 1        | —     | —                   | 9      | 4.27  |
| 6001 - 7000                  | 5  | 8         | —    | —   | —        | —     | —                   | 13     | 6.16  |
| 7001 - 8000                  | 2  | 5         | 2    | —   | —        | —     | —                   | 9      | 4.27  |
| Total                        | 11   | 36        | 19   | 55  | 9        | 81    | 211                 | 100.00 |       |

categories of rank. The families of *very high* category have income distribution of relative large range though the majority of the families (63.88 per cent) has income within the income range of Rs. 4,001 to Rs. 8,000. A considerable section of the families (33.33 per cent) have income, ranges from Rs. 1,801 to Rs. 4,000. In families of *high* category, income range is large but a preponderating section of them (78.94 per cent) has income range of Rs. 1801 to Rs. 4,000. This signifies two important features. *First*, the income of the families in *very high* category is distributed mainly in two different income ranges (Rs. 4,001—8,000 and Rs. 1,801—4,000). In larger income range, the percentage of distribution of families is high than the smaller income range. *Second*, the distribution of income in *high* category is restricted mainly in the income range of Rs. 1,801 to 4,000, while in other two income ranges, the percentage distribution of families is scanty. The percentage distribution of the families of *low*, *very low* and *lowest* categories of rank in different income ranges, points out that the income range in *low* categories is large while in the *very low* and *lowest* categories is narrow. In spite of, wide range of income of the families, belonging to *low* categories of rank, the percentage distribution of families suggests that the maximum families (56.38

TABLE 20

Annual income (in rupees) range and family distribution  
of the different categories of caste-tribes

| Annual income range<br>(in rupees) | Percentage distribution of the families in<br>different categories of rank |                       |       |                       |          |        |
|------------------------------------|--|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|----------|--------|
|                                    | Highest  | Very high             | High  | Low                   | Very low | Lowest |
| 700 – 1800                         | —  | 2.79                  | 10.54 | 38.18 → 88.88 → 86.42 |          |        |
| 1801 – 4000                        | —  | 33.33 → 78.94 → 56.38 |       | ↑                     | 11.11    | 13.58  |
| 4001 – 8000                        | 100.00 → 63.88   | 10.52                 | 5.44  | —                     | —        | —      |

Note : Arrow sign indicates the trends in distribution of the income size. Income size gradually decreases from the *highest* to the *lowest* categories of rank.

per cent) have income between Rs. 1,801 and Rs. 4,000. A sizeable section of the families (38.18 per cent) has income range of Rs. 700-1,800. In families of the *very low* and *lowest* categories of rank, the percentage distribution of families shows that the income range is relatively low. In both the categories, the families (88.88 per cent and 86.42 per cent respectively) are distributed in large percentages in the income range of Rs. 700-1,800. This signifies that there are four important features in the distribution of income size. *First*, the income range is though large in *low* category yet the families are mainly distributed in two income ranges (Rs. 700-1,800 and Rs. 1,801-4,000). *Second*, the percentage distribution of families in different categories of different income ranges, suggests that the income distribution is restricted mainly to one income range in *highest*, *high*, *very low* and *lowest* categories. In *highest* and *high* categories the income is high and in the *very low* and *lowest* categories the income is low. *Third*, the income of the *very high* and *low* is distributed to a relatively wide range. *Fourth*, the percentage distribution of families also suggests that the gradual decline of income from the *highest* to the *lowest* categories of rank leads to the conclusion that the income and stratification is intimately related in rural West Bengal. The high income is distributed to the families of *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories of castes.

*Cultural factors* : Cultural factors often determine the position of a caste or a tribe in the hierarchy. Custom of *Sanga* (widow remarriage), sororate, levirate, cross-cousin marriage and polygynous marriage, age of marriage, bride-price, domestication of particular types of animals, sacrifice of animals, diet, cooking principles, cooking utensils, commensality, dress and ornaments used by the castes or the tribes, giving and receiving of ritual services, concept of disease and its treatment, separate cremation place and mourning period are often considered to denote the position of a caste or a tribe in the hierarchy. Cultural factors sometimes overthrow all the dimensions and alone determine the position of a caste or a tribe.

In considering the cultural factors, I observed only a few existing characteristics of culture. Many of the cultural characteristics have changed owing to the emergence of *new scale of values*. The customs and beliefs which were once practised by

a caste or a tribe, now have become obsolete. Even though, existing cultural characteristics are still playing a considerable role for determination of the position of a caste or a tribe in the order of stratification.

*Sanga* is a local vocabulary which denotes the custom of widow remarriage. Widow remarriage was a widely practised custom of many lower castes and tribes. Among them many have left the custom at present as an endeavour to *sanskritize* their *style of life* and while others are pursuing it even now as a tradition, for instance, the Solanki caste once customarily married their widows but at present they have abandoned the custom and in reality made it forbidden. This widow marriage is either customary or obligatory among the villagers of *very low* and *lowest* categories and to others it is forbidden at present. *Sanga* is obligatory among the Mahalis, Bhumijes and the *Muchis*. All of them belong to the *lowest* category of the verbal rank of the villagers. The prevalence of *Sanga* marriage custom is associated with the levirate marriage. The levirate marriage custom is customary among the villagers of *very low* category and obligatory to the people of *lowest* category. The deceased elder brother's wife is married by younger brother when occasion arises (Sengupta, 1969).

The cross-cousin marriage system is only present among the people of *very low* and the *lowest* categories. They practise it customarily. There are two types of cross-cousin marriage : father's sister's daughter's marriage (F.S.D.) and mother's brother's daughter's marriage (M.B.D.). The latter type is preferred to the former type. The sororate marriage is likewise present among the people of the *very low* and *lowest* categories. The sororate marriage is of two types : restricted and non-restricted type. Polygynous marriage is customarily followed at present, by the villagers of *very low* and *lowest* categories as the female partners can join their hands in productive activities. The old practice of *Kulinism*, the custom of polygynous marriage have stopped by the Brahmans and other *very high* and *high* castes. It is true that the keeping of more wives has link with the income and prestige. But these have no more bearing on the polygyny as the people of high income group and social position have abandoned the polygynous marriage. The lower income group of *very low* and *lowest* social positions usually

practise this marriage to add more earning hands to their families. Moreover, through this marriage they try to intensify their kin relations as when they keep two or more wives, they usually practise sororal polygyny.

Age of marriage is another indicator which differentiates the position of a caste or a tribe. The people of *highest, very high* and *high* categories give marriage to their daughter as *Kishori* i.e. at puberty. The people of the *low, very low* and *lowest* categories give marriage to their girls as *Yubati* i.e. at adult age. The reason is economic. The marriage to these people is not a sacrament. They marry to get economic partners. They practise adult marriage only when the girls become mature for productive activities. The father receives, the *Kanya pan* (bride-price) for the loss of one of the earning members of his family and the bridegroom's family is benefitted by gaining one additional economic partner. Therefore, the capacity of earning is considered as one of the main qualities of the bride. Hence, the system of paying bride-price is seen to exist among the people of *very low* and *lowest* categories (Sengupta, 1967).

The domestication of pig and fowls, again is strictly avoided by the people of *highest, very high* and *high* categories. The villagers of *very low* and *lowest* categories prefer to possess live-stocks like pigs and fowls. They also sacrifice the pigs and fowls on ritual occasion before the deities and also for entertaining guests which are forbidden to the villagers of other categories.

Diet is the indicative of cultural superiority or inferiority. There are superior or inferior diet. Srinivas (1955) and Marriott (1968) observed the same at *Rampura* and *Kishan Garhi* respectively. *Amish* (non-vegetarian) food is inferior to *Niramish* (vegetarian) food. The Brahmins prefer vegetarian diet in auspicious days though they are fish and meat eaters in West Bengal. Meat again, has several kinds and each is related to stratification order. Goatmeat and mutton are superior to all kinds. Next comes in order, the pigeon, duck, fowl, pig and lastly the beef. The wild duck and wild pig are superior to the domesticated ones. The beef is the lowest of all kinds. Beef eating is extremely polluting and cannot be amended even by *Prayaschitta* (expiation). Pig eaters are ranked low because the pigs are the unclean eaters. They eat human excreta. Hence, pig meat is unclean. Similarly, the fowls are unclean because

they move in village paths and eat unclean stuff from garbage. Even goat meat is more superior than mutton (*khhasi*), because the latter is the meat of castrated goat which the upper caste Hindus never sacrifice on ritual occasion. Though pigeons are not in the habit of eating unclean things in comparison to fowl yet the villagers think them low who eat pigeon. Because the killing of such nice birds are demoralised and in the village the domestic pigeons are regarded as the symbol of peace and happiness in the household, the killer of which is considered as peace-breaker and evil to happiness and therefore is degraded low. The Baisnabas of *Kotaigarh* are vegetarian but they are not ranked higher than the Brahmans. Thus certain amount of ambiguity in the food habit as a criterion is obvious at *Kotaigarh*. The Brahmans though eat fish and meat but they avoid eating of these in any auspicious day like the Thursday and the Sunday and also on any ceremonial occasion. The avoidance of fish and meat is considered necessary for observing puritan life. The eating of crab, water snail, tortoise, some kinds of fish like the boal (*Walago attu*), sol (*Ophicephalus punctatus*) are avoided by the higher castes as they are eaten by the low castes. Egg-eaters are also ranked low, especially those who consume the eggs of hen. The Brahmans avoid hen-egg-eating. Drinking of *Hanria* or country-made liquor is degrading. Because, intoxication makes one ill to judge right and wrong. The Brahman eat only goat meat and certain selective fishes. The people of *very low* and *lowest* categories are beef (occasionally) and pig eaters which the villagers of other categories strictly avoid.

The cooking principle also indicates the position of the individuals in the stratification order. The use of spices, mustard oil, clarified butter and ways of cooking differ according to the position of the people in stratification order. The villagers of *very low* and *lowest* categories seldom use spices for cooking. They cook the food either by boiling or steaming. The other people use sufficient spices for taste and food is cooked by the combination of frying in mustard oil, roasting and boiling with due addition of spices. Besides, the villagers of *very low* and *lowest* categories do not consume milk, if occasionally they drink milk, they drink it adding salt in it. The villagers of *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories consume milk regularly adding

sugar in it. There is a saying in the village like, "adding of salt in milk makes it equivalent to beef". Therefore, the people of *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories never add salt to the milk. Moreover, the castes of *very low* and *lowest* categories add salt to rice at the time of cooking. The castes of *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories never add salt at the time of rice cooking. Salt when added to the cooked food it becomes *ento* (susceptible to pollution). Therefore, the castes of *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories avoid salt adding to the rice at cooking time. The cooking utensils of the villagers of *very low* and *lowest* categories mostly comprise of earthen material. The people of other categories use brass, belmetal and aluminium utensils. Possession of brass utensils indicates status and wealth. The food items are quite distinctive among different categories. The people of *very low* and *lowest* categories usually cook less items and the same items are followed for days and months. The primary items are soaked (*pantha*) rice and boiled or steamed leafy vegetables. Occasionally vegetables are burnt and pulses are boiled to add delicacy. In rainy season, *chuna* (little) *machh* (fishes) are caught from the paddy fields and cooked with meagre spices and water and are taken.

The food items of the people of *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories are variable. The items are changed frequently. The food items vary from family to family according to means and availability. They use both mustard oil and clarified butter for cooking to add delicacy to the dishes. The usual items are boiled rice, cooked pulses of various types, vegetable or fish fry, vegetable curry, fish, meat or egg curry. The vegetable and fish curry are prepared in various ways in different days.

The quantity of food ingredients of the villagers of *very low* and *lowest* categories differ from the *highest* and *very high* categories. The people of *very low* and *lowest* categories consume carbohydrate in high proportion and the usual source of carbohydrate is rice. The consumption of non-leafy vegetables, sugar, wheat, pulses, clarified butter, fruits, milk and other non-vegetable protein are very low. The people of *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories consume lesser quantity of carbohydrate, especially boiled rice and rice is substituted by wheat, sugar, puffed rice, non-leafy vegetables. Pulses are consumed much. The consumption of non-vegetable protein is relatively much high. Be-

sides, fats, oils, fruits and milk are the other ingredients which they consume in larger quantities.

Rank of the castes is also ascertained through commensality. Complete commensality may be said to exist only when all persons of either sex accept cooked food of all kinds or drinking water from each other (Srinivas, 1955 : 20). Acceptance of drinking water and cooked food are associated with the pollution concept. As a result a person only accepts cooked food and drinking water from the castes which he thinks equal in status or superior to him. Acceptance of cooked food and water from an inferior caste member pollutes him and to regain his normal ritual status purification ceremony is to be performed.

There are two types of food : *Kachha* (uncooked or cooked with water) and *Pakka* (cooked food with clarified butter and uncut fruits). The *Kachha* food is inferior and *Pakka* food is superior in quality. *Kachha* food pollutes an individual when it is taken from the hands of the castes of inferior status while *Pakka* food does not pollute. The villagers of *highest* category only never take any cooked food from the hands of the villagers of *low*, *very low* and *lowest* categories. They accept both *Kachha* and *Pakka* food from the hands of the villagers of *very high* and *high* categories. They also accept consecrated food even from the hands of the castes of *low* category. Likewise drinking water is acceptable from the hands of the castes of *very high* and *high* categories as they are called *Jal-chal* (water acceptable) group and never from the hands of the castes of *low*, *very low* and *lowest* categories who are the *Jal-achal* (water not acceptable) group. The people of *highest* category never take cooked food from the people of other categories. They only take the consecrated food from the hands of the people other than *very high* category. Similarly, the people of *very high* category take food from the hands of the people of *highest* category. The castes of *high* category accept food from the hands of the people of *highest*, and *very high* categories. Likewise the castes of *low* category accept food from the people of their superior categories. But the people of *very low* and *lowest* categories exchange foods among them. Besides, they accept foods from other superior categories.

Dress, ornaments and speech distinctively indicate the position of the individuals in the order of stratification. The castes

of *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories wear gold ornaments. Gold ornament is a symbol of status and prestige. The castes of *very low* and *lowest* categories wear brass and silver ornaments. The upper caste categories wear fine clothes : *dhuti* (lower garments of the men), *panjabi* (upper garment of the men), *sari* (lower garment of the women) and blouse (upper garment of the women). The castes of lower category wear coarse and short clothes : coarse *dhuti* (upto knee length) and coarse *sari* (upto little below knee length). The men and women usually do not wear upper garments. The castes of upper category speak in polite tongue and avoid slang words in public. The lower castes use rugged tongue and frequently utter slang words even in front of their children.

In course of my study, I made two sets of observations : (a) the castes of all categories and even the '*Adivasis*' cremated the dead bodies and (b) burial was used to a child below five years of age and persons dying of snake-bite or small pox. The villagers of *very low* and *lowest* categories often buried their dead bodies for economic reason. There was a separate cremation place (*Sasana*) for the villagers of *low*, *very low* and *lowest* categories. Again, I noted that the *Mahali* and the *Bhumiya* tribes of the *lowest* categories use separate *sasana* for cremation. This indicates that intra-tribal demarcation is there. All the castes of the *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories cremated their dead bodies in the same *sasana*. But the people of the *low*, *very low* and the *lowest* (excepting the tribes) categories cremated their dead bodies in separate *sasana*. It signifies that the cremation places were separated for the villagers according to thier categories and social position. The intra-categoric demarcation among the castes on the basis of *sasana* is absent but inter-categoric demarcation is there (Sengupta, 1970, pp. 46-47).

Again the duration of mourning period varies according to villagers' membership in verbal categories. The *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories observe eleven days mourning period according to Brahmanical values after the death of a near relatives. But the *low*, *very low* and the *lowest* categories observe it for a month. It indicates that the pollution after the death of a near relative is spread in the families and it lasts long in the case of the *lower* castes and is ceased to act upon the *upper* castes after a short period of eleven days.

Giving or receiving of ritual service is also an useful indicator of one's hierarchical position. The ritual service runs in the conformity of social distance, it indicates hierarchical position, cleanliness of the caste and the tribe involved and helps in sankritization (Sengupta, 1970, p. 25). Receiving of the ritual service of the Brahman, adds prestige. The villagers of *very low* and *lowest* categories never get the services of the Brahmans. Besides, the Napit, the Dhopa do not serve them. They have their own barber. The Hadi midwives in recent time serve the Mahalis and the Bhumijas. Previously elderly women of the Mahalis and the Bhumijas did the job of midwives of their own group. Again, the Brahmans and the Napit do not give ritual services to all categories of people. The Brahmans only serve the *highest*, *very high* and *high* categories of castes. The Napits serve the castes of these three categories and also some castes of low categories. Sengupta (1970, pp. 25-52) showed the patterns of caste-caste and tribe-caste interaction and give-take patterns of ritual services of the villagers at *Kotaigarh*. He noted that the social distance and position of caste could be determined through caste-caste and tribe-caste interaction and receiving and giving of ritual services offered to or denied of a caste or a tribe.

Concept of disease and its treatment even indicate sharp differences in social hierarchy. The villagers of *very low* and *lowest* categories deeply believe that the *Bongas* or spirits cause diseases to them. The wrath of *Bongas* and *Najar* (evil eyes) of the neighbours are seriously avoided. Besides, they believe in witch-craft (*Dain*) and they also think that the witches send diseases and calamity in the family (Sengupta, 1977, pp. 63-80). In case of illness, *Gunni* (sorcerer) is consulted and *telkhari* (divination) and *Murga bali* (sacrifice of fowl) are done to fight against the diseases. Commercial medicine is only used when *Gunni* fails to cure. This strange belief is mostly absent in other categories of castes. But in case of failure in medical treatment, a feeble hope brings them to rely on the native *Gunni* as a last resort (Sengupta, 1969a).

#### *Mobility in the status :*

The hierarchical status and its rise almost always requires some role performances and their sanctions. The latter depends on the notion of the local castes. This is a unique feature of

*Kotaigarh.* The castes, lower in the rank have been including many customs of the upper castes of the village, in their traditional norms and excluding many others which were once the striking features of their tradition and culture. This process of inclusion and exclusion of caste-custom is subservient to caste-centrism and on the sanction of the dominant caste or castes. In *Kotaigarh* the castes in search of better status than that of which was conceded to them, always try to follow the model of behaviour and custom of another caste with whom their contact is more regular and which stands not in too distance from them in the hierarchical order with complicated far-reaching caste-cus-tom. Pocock (1957, pp. 24-25) is essentially right when he observes a non-Brahman caste of relatively low status does imitate an *idea of Brahmanism* nor does it have general notions of secular prestige. For it, the models of conduct are the castes, higher than itself with which it is in the cloesest proximity. At *Kotaigarh* this is obvious that the lower castes like the Dhopa, the Kaibartta, the Hadi, the Muchi and he tribals like the Mahalis and the Bhumijas always try to achieve the Mahisya '*style of life*' for sanskritising their ways of living and caste-custtom. On the other hand the artisan and the servicing castes like the Kamar, the Kumhar, the Tanti, the Napit and two other castes like the Solanki and the Tambuli try to follow the Sadgop model of life. The Kayasthas, the Sadgops, the Moiras and the Baisnabas are seen to acquire the Brahmanical model. Thus in a single social system three models of caste-custtom (Mahisya, Sadgop and Brahman models) are seen to operate simultaneously. Singer (1964, pp. 84-119) has also drawn the attention to the fact that there exist not one or two models of sanskritisation but three if not four. How far a caste has attained the respective model depends on the sanction of the dominant castes of *Kotaigarh*. The sanction of the dominant castes again depends on the acceptance of Brahmins and the castes placed just below the Brahmins at *Kotaigarh*. Sometimes, there occurs differential sanction for the equal role performances by a set of castes or groups for interest and benefit of the sanctioning groups and capacity of satisfying the needs of them by sanction receiver groups. The Mahalis, the Bhumijas as for instance, are equally trying to follow the Mahisya *style of life*. The scale of role performance is equal but the Bhumijas are placed to a slightly higher rank than the Mahalis.

This status differentiation nonetheless is the outcome of the unequal sanction offered to them for equal role performance. The Mahalis are not conceded the status they claimed. The dominant castes of *Kotaigarh* are less dependable to the Mahalis than the Bhumijas for agricultural services. Because of the basketry trade in the village, the Mahalis ignore in many occasions, the arduous agricultural services to the dominant castes. The Bhumijas as share-croppers and agricultural labourers are given better status for the closer dependence of the dominant landowning castes to them. Again there is an unequal role performance, sought by the different families of a single caste. Thus family distinction with respect to sanskritisation gives rise to a complex situation. For instance, two Kumhar families of the village have adopted Brahmanical dietary patterns; they forgive eating of fowls, eggs of hen, onion and in auspicious days like the Thursday and the Sunday they are not eating lentils and any kind of fish and meat. In this respect they are following the Brahmanical model. But rest of the potter families are following the Sadgop model and yet to copy the Brahmanical *style of dietary habits*. But the intra-caste relation that between the potters who have adopted Brahmanical model and those who are following the Sadgop *style of life*, is somewhat ambiguous. The latter accept cooked food of both *kachha* and *pacca* types (see Hutton, 1963, pp. 74-75, for the meaning of *kachha* and *pacca* food) from the former but the former only accept *pacca* food or raw ingredients of food. As such the potters who follow the Sadgop 'style of life' are considered inferior to the potters who have adopted some Brahmanical dietary custom. But this is not acceptable to the rest of the castes of the village. They rank all the potters family in the same level. But there is distinct cleavage in the intra-caste solidarity owing to unequal role performances for raising status. Srinivas (1966, p. 6) points out that often a caste claims a position which its neighbours are not willing to concede. This type of disagreement between claimed and conceded status may not be only in the realm of opinion but also in the more important realm of institutionalised practice. However, there are some Bhumijas and the Mahalis who have given up pork eating, *Hanria* (country made liquor) drinking etc. There is a constant inclusion of upper caste custom and exclusion of lower caste custom. This brings in one hand the intra-caste cleavage in food transaction and exchange

of reciprocal obligation, on the other hand this offers the chances and hopes to the penalising customs of our society to be outmoded step by step. The caste can change its rank only by the better role performances of the majority of its members. The mobility associated with sanskritisation results in positional changes in the system and does not lead to any structural change (Srinivas, 1966, p. 7).

The Baisnabas try to raise the status in hierarchy by sanskritising their customs and '*style of life*'. But the combined non-sanction of the other castes resists them to raise in the ladder. The Baisnabas are the strictly vegetarian and they employ their own priest and do not call the Brahman priest for ritual service. They accept cooked food from the hands of the Brahmins but the Brahmins do not accept cooked food and water from them. This is a parochial distinction of the Baisnabas and this distinction has no generalised implication. Again the Mahalis are graded with the Muchis and the Bhumijas. But they claim that they are superior to the Hadis, the Muchis and the Bhumijas. In support, they say that they are basket-makers. This occupation is not defiling occupation in comparison to the occupation of the Hadis, the Muchis and the Bhumijas. Besides, many of them have given up beef-eating which the Muchis still follow. On the contrary, the Bhumijas claim superiority on the ground that they receive ritual services from the barber and the Hadis though these specialists are degraded in the village and the upper castes do not take their services.

Now it appears, that the position claimed by a caste differs from the position conceded to it by others. The untouchables have to live apart from the other castes and they may not bathe or take water from a pond which is utilised by the upper castes. The untouchables cannot enter the temple of the upper castes but the smiths can do though he serves the untouchables. Some pollution is involved in the work of the barber and the washerman. But the former is given much better status than the washerman, for his compulsory participation in ritual occasion of the upper caste Hindus. The latter is placed near the bottom.

The Kayasthas and the Sadgops at *Kotaigarh* regard themselves higher than any other castes excepting the Brahmins. Hence they are placed at the top of the middle group of the caste. Here comes some local factors. At *Kotaigarh* the Sad-

gops are dominant landed caste and the Tambulis and the Kumhars are next to them in holding strength and importance. This local dominance gives the Tambulis and the Kumhars a high status among the castes of the village. Beyond the numerical strength and landholding, the actual occupation and sanskritisation are also important determinants of the status. Thus stratification is influenced by the local factors which are changeable through time and space and therefore the stratification is dynamic in nature.

The Mahalis, the Muchis and the Bhumijas are swine herder. They eat pork and drink *Hanria*. Their touch defiles. Hence they are placed together in the same categories of rank only the Bhumijas being placed in the top than the Mahalis as they are receiving the ritual services of the degraded Napits and the Hadis.

The castes of *Kotaigarh* are placed on the basis of ideas regarding pollution. But there arise ambiguities regarding the conceptualisation of stratification order of the people and actual behaviour exists between them. In conceptualising the stratification ritual consideration is not underemphasised but day to day economic and political relationships between the castes and the tribes are fundamental to the stratification order.

Thus relations between a poor Brahman priest and a rich Sadgop caste is complex. The Brahman knows the position of the caste in the village and the Sadgop is also aware of the Brahman's ritual position. The Mahali and the Bhumija are treated as inferior tribes but when a Sadgop panchayat member meets three panchayat members of these two tribal groups behave differently. Thus ritual, economy, political situation and also education play their role in the contact between individuals of different castes and guide positional change in stratification.

## CHAPTER IV

### STATUS GROUP AGGREGATE AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY : A CASE OF BENAPUR

Benapur is the residence of 793 individuals. They belong to three religious groups, viz., the *Hindu*, the *Adivasi* and the *Musalmana*. The *Hindus* are numerically stronger than the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas*. Further, 553 *Hindu* residents are segmented into ten castes or *jatis*. These *jatis* are again, grouped into two broad categories on the basis of distinctive *style of life* and as such constitute two status group aggregates (Sengupta, 1970, p. 62).

The *Hindus* are denoted by the tribals through a collective term such as the *Diku*. The tribals are represented by a single community namely the Santals whom the *Hindus* verbally classed as the *Adivasi*. The Muslims are the representatives of the *Sheik* subdivision. Both the *Hindus* and the tribals introduce the Muslims to the strangers as the *Musalmana* in local Bengali word.

The people of Benapur are dependent upon the religious traditions and beliefs of their parents and Peers. The socio-political organisation of the tribals are subordinate to their religious life and organisation. Sacrifices of the fowls, the pigs and the goats are invaluable features of their religious life which strengthen and renew the relationship with their *Bongas* (spirits). To the *Hindus* prayer is the ordinary concomitant of the sacrifice by which the worshipper explains the reason of his gifts, urges the deity to accept it and asks for help in needs. The *Hindus* believe in the doctrines of *Karma* (action) and *Dharma* (duty) which inspire them to remain content with the ascribed position by birth and to persue *Kulo* (family) *Dharma* and *Jati* (caste) *Dharma* for better position in the next birth. *Dharma* has various shades of meanings. It means law proper, rules of right, morality, religion, innate quality, justice and above all duty. In Brahmanical literature, *Dharma* has three-fold branches : *Achara dharma* which includes usages, rules, customs and ceremonies, *Vyavahara dharma* which means law proper and *Prayaschitta dharma* which involves rules of atonement and penances (Ketkar, 1909, pp. 56-57). The

Muslims hold the doctrines of unity and omnipotence of *Allah* (God). Their religion emphasises the submissive tendency, the implicit surrender and entire obedience to *Allah*.

Thus cleavage exists in the village on the basis of religion and the villagers polarise into three distinct religious groups namely the *Hindu*, the *Musalmana* and the *Adivasi*. Hindu castes are endogamous in nature with a traditional calling while the latter two have no such divisions.

Like the status group aggregates of the *Hindus*, the Muslims and the tribals may be considered as simple status group aggregate each, owing to fair uniformity in *life styles* of their members. Throughout this study, the *Adivasi* and the *Musalmana* have been treated as the status group aggregates rather than separate religious entities.

#### VARNA AND JATI DIVISION

*Hindu* villagers of *Benapur* have no clear notion of the *varna* division of the *Hindus*. They know the mythical origin of the *Chaturvana* viz., Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sundra, but according to local usage they distinguish the *Hindu* villagers into two verbal classes or *varnas*, for instance *Uchhavarna* and *Nichuvarna*. They also use the term *Uchhajati* and *Nichujati* which literally means high castes and low castes respectively. These two latter terms are interchangeably used to denote *Uchhavarna* and *Nichuvarna*. Here, the words *jati* and *varna* are synonymously used to denote a set of castes, i.e. each category includes several castes. Thus it seems that the term *varna* in *Benapur* is used in a comprehensive sense, but the term *jati* is used both in a comprehensive and a specific sense, for instance the word *Uchhajati* is frequently used to specify collectively, the Brahman, the Baidya, the Kayastha castes. Similarly, the *Nichujati* is used to mean others. This terminological comprehensiveness subscribes that many *jatis* though together from one *varna* yet the whole *Uchhavarna* or *Nichuvarna* may be a *jati*. Thus the word *jati* also denotes both smaller and larger groups, prevailed in *Benapur*. The *jati* or *varna* means here, the forms of existence by birth.

### MYTHICAL ORIGIN

The people of *Uchhavarna* are thought to be the derivatives of the Brahman and the Kshatriya divisions, who are believed to be originated from the mouth and arms of the '*Brahma*', the creator of the universe. Mouth is the aperture for intake of food which absorbs energy (*sakti*). It is the exit of expression of the *sruti* (heard), *darsan* (seen), *ghrana* (smelt), *sparsha* (felt) and *asvad* (tasted). All the expressions are from the *smriti* (memory) the seat of *gnan* (knowledge). On the other hand, arms protect and preserve the *Niyam* (rules and customary laws). Thus *sristi* (creation) and *sthiti* (preservation of creation) rest on the members of *Uchhavarna* or *Uchhajati* for which they are assigned high status. On the contrary, the members of the *Nichuvarna* or *Nichujati* are thought to be the derivatives of *Vaisya* and *Sudra* divisions and believed to be originated from the thighs and feet of the '*Brahma*' and thus they are conceded low status. Thigh helps in supporting the creation and preservation for enriching the material existence. The *Nichuvarna* or *Nichujati* are the supportive and load bearing members of the society and are conceded inferior status to the *Uchhavarna* or *Uchhajati*, the members of which are associated with creation and preservation of society. However, these two major categories (*Uchhavarna* and *Nichuvarna*) are denoted by two other frequently used rural terms, viz., the *Bhadralok* and the *Chhotolok* as status group aggregates. In Benapur, the *Bhadraloks* include two castes namely, the Brahman and the Kayastha. The *Chhotolok* includes seven castes namely, the Sekra, the Kalu, the Dhopa, the Hadi, the Bagdi, the Bauri and the Dule. There *Chhotolok* denotes the men of lower castes. They are synonymous to Hutton's (1963) exterior castes. They remain outside the *Hindu* pale of life. The term *Bhadralok* replaces the term *Uchhavarna* and the term *Chhotolok* is used to denote the people of *Nichuvarna*. It is noted, therefore, that the *Hindus* are divided into two status group aggregates : the *Bhadralok* and the *Chhotolok* on the basis of life-style. The *Adivasi* and the *Musalmans* are also considered as status group aggregates. Thus Benapur is inhabited by the people belonging to four status group aggregates.

The cultural characteristics of each status group aggregate can be measured by *pure* and *impure* scale or *honourable* and

*non-honourable* scale of values. Conversely, the *honourable* and *non-honourable* cultural characteristics are the determining denominator of the demarcation lines between the status group aggregates. There are several criteria on which the position of a status group aggregate in stratification ladder is determined.

#### WATER LINE

In between the *Bhadraloks* and the *Chhotoloks*, there is another set of castes, in the region but not in the village of study whom the people denote as *Nabasakha* meaning nine clean castes. These nine castes are the Sadgop (cultivator), Tambuli (trader), Kamar (blacksmith), Kumhar (potter), Napit (barber), Teli (oil-seller), Tanti (weaver), Goalā (milk-seller), and the Bene (mercantile caste). The *Bhadraloks* distinguish the *Nabasakhas* as *Jal-achal* (water acceptable) group and the *Chhotoloks* as *Jal-achal* (water not acceptable) group which means the *Nabasakhas* are offered superior status to the *Chhotoloks*.

In the region, though both the *Bhadralok* and the *Nabasakha* groups abstain from taking water at the hands of the *Chhotoloks* yet rigidity in this respect is not precise among the members of the *Nabasakhas*. A few members of this group occasionally break even the minimum restriction. With the emergence of village leaders from the *Chhotolok* group and the circulation of 'Socialistic' outlook in the village, the members of this group are speaking against the *Bhadralok* and the *Nabasakha* groups whenever they find opportunity and try to establish their rights in village lands to eradicate their disabilities minimising the social distance with the *Bhadralok* and the *Nabasakha*. At least three castes, like the Dhopa, the Kalu, and the Sekhra have tended to place them apart from the *Chhotolok* group. A few members of the *Nabasakha* groups are taking drinking water from their hands.

#### OCCUPATION

The concept of purity and pollution is subservient to many factors. It governs the distinctiveness of the *Bhadralok* from the others. There are some occupations which are pure and non-pollutionary and some are not. There are some actions which

are pure and others are not. Thus there is a wide horizon of the *style of living* which is guided by this pure and impure scale (Bougle, 1963; Dube, 1955; Dumont and Pocock, 1959; Hutton, 1963; Mayer, 1956; Srinivas, 1955; Mathur, 1964). The situation at Benapur reveals that the priestly occupation of the Brahmins and the scribing work of the Kayasthas are considered pure while the manual work in agricultural field by the *Chhotoloks* are considered polluting. Again the sweeping and midwifery, oil-pressing and washing of clothes are considered as impure works.

Benapur is predominantly an agricultural village. The majority of the villagers participate in paddy cultivation. The villagers participate in paddy cultivation in various ways : owner-supervisor, owner-cultivator, tenant (share-cropping) and labourers. The main demarcation line between the *Bhadraloks* and others is the former's abstention from the manual work. The *Bhadraloks* consider it degrading and participate in paddy cultivation as own-supervisors. They employ either *Chhut krishan* (day-labourer) or *Nagare* (contractual labourer) for tilling their lands. They also employ *Bhag kishan* (share-cropper) for raising paddy. The total outturn is shared equally by the *Bhadralok* owner and the cultivators (*Krishan*). On the other hand the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmans* participate in paddy cultivation as owner-cultivator, tenant and labourers. The *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* are mostly labourers whereas the *Musalmans* are mostly tenants (Sengupta, 1970, pp. 68-69). Thus on the basis of participation in paddy production the Benapur cultivators may be arranged hierarchically, the *Bhadraloks* are at the top and the *Musalmans*, the *Adivasis* and the *Chhotoloks* may be placed in order of superiority next to them.

Apart from the paddy cultivation there are five other important occupations : shopownership, teaching, clerical job, priesthood and doctor. Shopownership is found both among the *Bhadraloks* and the *Chhotoloks*. The shops owned by the *Bhadraloks* are relatively bigger than the *Chhotoloks*. The other four white-collar jobs and professions are solely done by the *Bhadraloks*. Table 21, further represents the figures which visualise that the non-*Bhadraloks* (rest) have been tended towards manual occupations while the *Bhadraloks* towards non-manual pursuits.

The *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmans*, till their own-land and the lands of the *Bhadraloks* either as *Chhut krishan*

TABLE 21

The primary occupations and the status group aggregates in Benapur

| Occupations                                       | Status group aggregates |                |                  |                |                |              |                  |                |   |
|---|-------------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|------------------|----------------|---|
|   | Bhadralok<br>No.        | Bhadralok<br>% | Chhotolok<br>No. | Chhotolok<br>% | Adivasi<br>No. | Adivasi<br>% | Musalmans<br>No. | Musalmans<br>% |   |
| 1   | 2                       | 3              | 4                | 5              | 6              | 7            | 8                | 9              |   |
| <i>I. Cultivation :</i>                           |                         |                |                  |                |                |              |                  |                |   |
| (i) Owner-supervisor                              | 6                       | 17.65          | —                | —              | —              | —            | —                | —              | — |
| (ii) Owner-cultivator<br>and<br>Share-cropper     | —                       | —              | 36               | 23.69          | 24             | 29.27        | 18               | 78.25          | — |
| (iii) Contractual labourer                        | —                       | —              | 7                | 4.60           | 2              | 2.44         | —                | —              | — |
| (iv) Day-labourer                                 | *5                      | 14.71          | 66               | 43.42          | 53             | 64.63        | —                | —              | — |
| <i>II. White collar jobs<br/>and profession :</i> |                         |                |                  |                |                |              |                  |                |   |
| (i) Service (clerical<br>jobs)                    | 10                      | 29.40          | 3                | 1.97           | —              | —            | 1                | 4.35           | — |
| (ii) Teacher                                      | 4                       | 11.76          | —                | —              | —              | —            | —                | —              | — |
| (iii) Pension holder                              | 1                       | 2.94           | —                | —              | —              | —            | —                | —              | — |
| (iv) Doctor                                       | 1                       | 2.94           | —                | —              | —              | —            | —                | —              | — |
| (v) Homœo-practitioner                            | —                       | —              | —                | —              | —              | —            | 1                | 4.35           | — |

TABLE 21 (*Contd.*)

|                           | 1  | 2      | 3   | 4      | 5  | 6      | 7  | 8      | 9    |
|---------------------------|----|--------|-----|--------|----|--------|----|--------|------|
| (vi) Compounder           | 1  | 2.94   | —   | —      | —  | —      | —  | —      | —    |
| (vii) Priesthood          | 2  | 5.88   | —   | —      | —  | —      | —  | —      | —    |
| III. <i>Others</i>        | —  | —      | —   | —      | —  | —      | —  | —      | —    |
| (i) Beggar                | 3  | 8.82   | 2   | 1.97   | 1  | 1.22   | —  | 1      | 4.35 |
| (ii) Shop-keeper          | —  | —      | 1   | 1.32   | —  | —      | —  | —      | —    |
| (iii) Goldsmith           | —  | —      | 1   | 0.66   | —  | —      | —  | —      | —    |
| (iv) Midwife              | —  | —      | 1   | 0.66   | —  | —      | —  | —      | —    |
| (v) Cow herder            | 1  | 2.94   | 18  | 11.84  | 2  | 2.44   | —  | —      | —    |
| (vi) Washerman            | —  | —      | 1   | 0.66   | —  | —      | —  | —      | —    |
| (vii) Carpenter           | —  | —      | —   | —      | —  | —      | —  | 1      | 4.35 |
| (viii) Umbrella repairing | —  | —      | —   | —      | —  | —      | —  | —      | —    |
| (ix) Fisherman            | —  | —      | 6   | 3.95   | —  | —      | —  | —      | —    |
| (x) Maid servant          | —  | —      | 7   | 4.60   | —  | —      | —  | —      | —    |
| (xi) Husking              | —  | —      | 1   | 0.66   | —  | —      | —  | —      | —    |
| Total                     | 34 | 100.00 | 152 | 100.00 | 82 | 100.00 | 23 | 100.00 |      |

\* These members are not *Kulin* Kayastha. They have come from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to settle down in Benapur. Benapur villagers call them 'Bangal' Kayastha and their position in the village is low.

or *Nagare*, or as *Bhag-krishan*. This pattern of occupation allocates superior status to the *Bhadraloks* and inferior status to the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmans*. The participation of women in the productive activities is an indicative of the hierarchical position. The *Bhadraloks*' wives are home makers and the social secretaries of the families. They do not participate in productive activities with the men. Their homes are well managed and run with the help of the general servant or with hourly services of *Chhotolok* women or men and even sometimes with the members from the *Adivasi* group.

The figures in the table 22 indicate that the *Bhadralok* and the *Musalmana* women, do not take part in productive activities. The *Adivasi* women almost equally participate with their men members in productive activities. The *Chhotolok* women do participate though in smaller percentage than the *Adivasi* women. This has been considered as an indicative of the *style of living*.

TABLE 22

Distribution of status group aggregate, sex and earners in Benapur.

| Status group<br>aggregate | No. of earners |        | Percentage of earners |        |       |
|---------------------------|----------------|--------|-----------------------|--------|-------|
|                           | Male           | Female | Male                  | Female | Total |
| <i>Bhadralok</i>          | 34             | —      | 23.95                 | —      | 23.95 |
| <i>Chhotolok</i>          | 111            | 41     | 27.00                 | 9.98   | 36.98 |
| <i>Adivasi</i>            | 45             | 37     | 31.69                 | 26.06  | 57.75 |
| <i>Musalmana</i>          | 23             | —      | 23.47                 | —      | 23.47 |

This is apparent from the earner dependent ratio of the different status group aggregates presented in the table 23 that the number of dependents are high in *Bhadralok* and *Musalmana* groups. The moderate percentage of *Chhotolok* women are as active as the men within the productive activities, as such, the ratio of the workers and the purely dependents is small in this status group aggregate which is 1 : 2.7. Similarly, the *Adivasi* women participate in high percentage with their men in productive activities. In spite of their relatively large family size, the

ratio of the workers and the purely dependents stands as 1 : 1.7, which means that they have the smallest number of dependents.

TABLE 23

Distribution of status group aggregate and earners  
in Benapur

| Status group aggregate | Total population | No. of earners | Percentage of earners | No. of dependents | Percentage of dependents | Dependents per earner |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Bhadralok              | 142              | 34             | 23.96                 | 108               | 76.05                    | 4.1                   |
| Chhotolok              | 411              | 152            | 36.98                 | 259               | 63.02                    | 2.7                   |
| Adivasi                | 142              | 82             | 57.75                 | 60                | 42.25                    | 1.7                   |
| Musalmana              | 98               | 23             | 23.47                 | 75                | 76.53                    | 4.2                   |
| Total                  | 793              | 291            | 36.69                 | 502               | 63.35                    | 1.7                   |

The *Musalmanas* women do not participate in the productive activities like the *Bhadralok* women because of the custom of wearing the *Borkha* (garments covering whole body parts including head and face). Likewise the *Bhadralok* women remain behind the *Purda* (curtain) to avoid their presence in front of the non-relatives. However, the ratio of the workers and the purely dependents in *Bhadraloks* and the *Musalmanas* stand as 1 : 4.1 and 1 : 4.2 respectively.

#### LANDOWNERS

However, landholding is not considered degrading and as such it is not objectionable to the *Bhadraloks*. Land is not only the source of wealth, it is the source of power too. The land distribution is dispersed in Benapur. All the status group aggregates own lands. But, if the ownership of different status group aggregates is compared, it reveals that the largest portion of the lands is owned by the *Bhadraloks* (Sengupta, 1970, pp. 67-68). In the village 63 households are land owners and they own 166.04 acres

TABLE 24

Distribution of status group aggregates and the owners and non-owners of land in Benapur

| Status group<br>aggregate | No. of<br>house-<br>holds | No. of households<br>Owners | No. of<br>Non-<br>owners | Percentage<br>Owners | Non-<br>owners | Amount<br>of<br>holding<br>in<br>acres | Average<br>holding<br>of lands<br>in acres |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------|--|--|
| <i>Bhadralok</i>          | 19                        | .16                         | 3                        | 84.21                | 15.79          | 79.66                                  | 4.73                                       |
| <i>Chhotolok</i>          | 79                        | 26                          | 53                       | 32.91                | 67.09          | 40.39                                  | 1.55                                       |
| <i>Adivasi</i>            | 25                        | 7                           | 18                       | 28.00                | 72.00          | 19.33                                  | 2.76                                       |
| <i>Musalmans</i>          | 18                        | 14                          | 4                        | 77.77                | 22.23          | 26.66                                  | 1.90                                       |
| Total                     | 141                       | 63                          | 78                       | 44.68                | 55.32          | 166.04                                 | 2.63                                       |

of lands. The *Bhadraloks* (16 households) hold 79.66 acres i.e., nearly fifty percent of the total village lands. The *Chhotoloks* (peasantry), the *Adivasis* (tribes) and the *Musalmans* (Muslims) together constitute 47 landowning households. They occupy 86.38 acres of lands.

Table 24 indicates that the average holding of lands among the *Bhadraloks* is nearly five acres but the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasi* and the *Musalmana* hold lands on average mostly below two acres. The slightly higher acres of average landholding are owned by the *Adivasis* because of relatively less number of possessors, only seven households own land out of twentyfive households in the village. The *Chhotoloks* occupy 40.39 acres which are nearly 24.40 percent of the village cultivable lands. The rest 45.99 acres are shared by the *Musalmans* (26.66 acres) and the *Adivasis* (19.33) acres). The *Musalmans* as such, occupy 16.05 percent and the *Adivasis* hold 11.64 percent of the village lands.

The *Bhadraloks*, thus own the fortune of controlling large number of *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmans* letting them lands on share-crop basis and appointing them as labourers in their lands. The *Bhadraloks* pay value on the landed property and they invest in land for superior prestige, control over the villagers, and security from its possession. Thus possession of wealth or landed property appears to be the economic goal of the *Bhadraloks*. The *Chhotoloks* have minimum possession when their holding is compared with other status group aggregates, excepting the *Adivasis*. But they are numerically dominant group of the village (Sengupta, 1969).

### EDUCATION

It has already been pointed out that some of the *Bhadraloks* have taken white-collar jobs and profession. Income is earned largely by the male head who actively follows a profession, operates a family owned business or farm and is engaged in service. For this they learned english-language, in course of their education. The *Bhadraloks* are mostly literate (80.47 per cent). Even a large percentage of their women is literate (77.59 per cent). On the contrary, the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmans* are mostly illiterate (78.22 per cent) and large number of their women (85.87 per cent) has no knowledge of writing or reading.

TABLE 25  
Distribution of status group aggregates and literacy level in *Benapur*

| Status group aggregate | Literate |       | Illiterate |       | School Final standard |       | Graduate standard |       | Percent of total |                |
|------------------------|----------|-------|------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|------------------|----------------|
|                        | Men      | Women | Men        | Women | Men                   | Women | Men               | Women | Men              | Other literate |
| <i>Bhadralok</i>       | 40       | 45    | 14         | 11    | 10                    | 2     | 6                 | —     | 19.53            | 80.47          |
| <i>Chhotolok</i>       | 51       | 22    | 131        | 146   | —                     | —     | —                 | —     | 97.92            | 2.08           |
| <i>Adivasi</i>         | 9        | —     | 52         | 57    | —                     | —     | —                 | —     | 92.38            | 7.62           |
| <i>Musalmans</i>       | 22       | 16    | 17         | 28    | —                     | —     | —                 | —     | 54.22            | 45.78          |

Besides, many members (eighteen members) of the *Bhadralokas* have passed the school final examination and graduate standards.

Thus education itself becomes the hall mark of *Bhadralok* status, though this does not necessarily mean that all the individuals of the *Bhadraloks* are educated or have obtained education. Not every family can afford the expenses of education for their sons. But the education and white-collar jobs are the accepted ideals. *Bhadraloks* seek education as a requisite to success in business and indispensable in white-collar jobs. The college-educated men are engaged in white-collar jobs and non-college educated men are either engaged in business or in paddy cultivation enterprise. Most of the earners of the *Bhadraloks* are literate but the percentage of literacy sharply falls in case of the *Chhotoloks* (2.08 per cent) and the *Adivasis* (7.62 per cent). But the percentage of literacy in case of *Musaimanas* is relatively high (45.78 per cent) than the *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis*. This is because of their better economic condition.

#### PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

These relationships are noticed through various socio-economic ties at Benapur : Master-servant, landowner-tenant, creditor-debtor and the like. These ties are established at first for mutual economic interests which when become enduring are transformed into extra-economic relationships (Mrs. Sengupta, 1969, pp. 80-84). The *Bhadraloks* are the providers and the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musaimanas* are the provided. The socio-economic and political dominance of the *Bhadraloks* and social segregation of the *Chhotoloks* are the main feature in the *Bhadralok-Chhotolok* interaction (Sinha and Bhattacharya, 1969, pp. 50-65). In master-servant relationship, the *Bhadraloks* are the masters, known severally as *Babu*, *Manib* and *Mahajan*. They appoint agricultural labourers and domestic servants. In landowner-tenant relationship, the *Bhadraloks* offer their lands to the *Bhagkrishan* on share-crop basis. In creditor-debtor relationship, the *Bhadraloks* are the lenders and the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adiyasis* and the *Musaimanas* are the borrowers of money. This power of providing the jobs, and the credit to the individuals place the *Bhadraloks* to the superior status (Mrs. Sengupta, 1969 and 1974).

### RITUAL SERVICES

The *Bhadraloks* receive the ritual services of the Brahman, the Napit, the Dhopa and the Hadi. But the *Chhotoloks* do not get the services of the Brahman. Each caste of the *Chholotok* has its own caste *purohit* (priest). There is a *Chhotolok* Napit (barber) in the village and he is Dule (agricultural labourer) by caste. He serves all the *Chhotoloks* in ritual occasions. The *Adivasis* have their own priest and barber. Similarly the *Musalmanas* have their own *Maulabi* (specialist on customary law) and barber. The services of the washerman (Dhopa) and midwife (Hadi) are received by the *Bhadraloks* as well as by the *Chhotoloks*. The *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas* do not receive the services of the midwife belonging to the Hadi caste. They have their own midwife belonging to their own community. The ritual service pattern indicates the position of the status group aggregates. The services of the Brahman and the Napit are status stricken (Sengupta, 1973 b).

### CULTURAL FACTORS

Each status group aggregate has a distinctive *style of life*. There are differences in house types, household utensils, dress, speech, manners, rituals and *style of life*. These are visible in observation. The *Bhadraloks* live in spacious and commodious houses with raised plinth and with number of windows and doors. The *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas* live in little huts having a door and mostly without windows. The plinths are not sufficiently raised from the ground level. In most cases the windows are replaced by the round or square opening in the wall in which stout bamboo splits are fixed vertically as a protection against the thieves. The *Bhadraloks* use belmetal and aluminium utensils, brass and glass wares. The *Chhotoloks* the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas* possess a number of earthen utensils and one or two aluminium wares. The *Bhadraloks* wear fine clothes and gold ornaments while the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis*, and the *Musalmanas* wear clothes of coarse fabrics and silver ornaments. The speech of the *Bhadraloks* is refined while that of the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas* is rugged.

*Marriage* : Marriage philosophy is different in different sta-

tus group aggregates. To the *Bhadraloks*, marriage is a sacrament and religious considerations are important. *Putrarthe Kriyate Varjya*, meaning wife is meant for son. A son is wanted for periodical rituals including *Sradha* (funeral rites) which pulls the dead ancestors out of the *Naraka* (hell). Marriage negotiates the status of an individual and enables the individual to enter into the *Garhastya jivan* (household life). Besides, a son is essential to supervise the cultivation of the family land and to look after the parents in old age.

Among the *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis*, marriage has a more secular character. It is necessary to secure an economic assistant and son to help in productive pursuits. Rituals are performed on the occasion of marriage for recognition of the partnership by the whole community. To the *Musalmanas* the marriage is a contract which a man and a woman enter into by mutual agreement. Rituals are also performed for the sanction of the marriage contract by the society.

Table 26 indicates the sharp difference in marriage pattern of the *Bhadraloks* and other status group aggregates. The *Bhadraloks* marry their daughters at lower age preferably after the attainment of the girls' puberty. The average ages of marriage of the girls are 14 to 18 years. The *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas* marry their daughters comparatively in higher ages. The average ages of marriages of their girls are 18 to 25 years. The *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* pay bride price to the girl's father. The *Chhotoloks* pay *pān* (bride price) to the girl's father and this is fixed at the time of negotiation. The bride price is variable and the amount depends on many points : quality of the bride, and the bridegrooms. Similarly the *Adivasis* pay *bapla-gonong* (bride price) to the girl's father and it is fixed on the quality of the bride and the bridegroom. This custom of paying bride price is not present among the *Bhadraloks*. The custom of paying of dowry (*Joutuk*) is present among them. In the *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* the custom of paying bride-price owes inferior status to them.

The marriage of the *Bhadralok* girls and boys is settled by negotiation through *Ghatak* (broker) and finally takes place with the permission of the guardians. Dowry and other considerations are settled amicably between the bride and the bridegroom parties. Among the *Chhotoloks*, the negotiation is made through relatives.

TABLE 26  
Marriage patterns of different status group aggregates

| Marriage patterns              | Bhadraloks   | Chhotoloks  | Adivasis  | Musalmans                                       |
|--------------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| 1                              | 2  | 3   | 4   | 5   |
| Philosophy of marriage :       | Marriage is a sacrament and religious considerations are important | Marriage is a security through economic partnership and son             | Marriage is a security through economic partnership and son   | Marriage is a contract through mutual agreement |
| Girls' age of marriage :       | 14-18 years  | 18-25 years   | 18-25 years   | 18-25 years                                     |
| Custom of paying bride-price : | Absent   | Essential   | Essential   | Absent  |
| Marriage types :               | Negotiation through Ghatak (broker) and guardians                  | Negotiation through relatives 'elopment and marriage by mutual consent' | Negotiation through Raibar (go-between), Angir (elopment), Tana (forcible application of vermilion in the hair-parting of the bride), Ghar mechano (marriage by intrusion), Raji khusi (mutual consent) | —   |

TABLE 26 (*Contd.*)

| 1  | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| Ritual services at marriage :                    | Brahman and Napit attend | Not attend               | Not attend               | Not attend       |
| <i>Sanga</i> (widow) marriage :                  | Forbidden                | Widely practised         | Widely practised         | Widely practised |
| Levirate marriage :                              | Forbidden                | Customary                | Obligatory               | Practised        |
| Sororate marriage :                              | 'Not honourable          | Customary                | Customary                | Practised        |
| <i>Gharjamai</i> (resident son-in-law) keeping : | 'Not honourable          | Customary and honourable | Customary and honourable | —                |
| Divorce :  | Forbidden                | Widely present           | Widely present           | Widely present   |

Marriage by elopment, marriage by mutual agreement are also happened occasionally. The marriage of the *Adivasi* boys and girls is negotiated through the *raibar* (go-between) and *manjhi* (headman). *Angir* (marriage by elopment), *tana* (marriage by rubbing vermilion forcibly in the hair parting of the girl), *Ghar mechrano* (marriage by intrusion) and *Raji-khusi* (marriage by mutual consent) are also the widely practised types of marriages. The *Bhadraloks* disregard all these types.

There is a distinct pattern of ritual services at marriage. The Brahman, the Napit attend the marriage rituals of the *Bhadraloks*. In the marriage of the *Chhotoloks*, their own priest and barber do the job of the priest and the barber. The *Adivasi* marriages are performed by the *Laya* (*Adivasi* priest).

Cousin marriage is present among the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasi* and the *Musalmanas*. The *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* practise cross-cousin marriage while the *Musalmanas* practise both cross-cousin and parallel-cousin marriages. The *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* prefer to marry mother's brother's daughter. The father's sister's daughter is married incidentally. The *Bhadraloks* dislike and avoid cousin marriages.

*Sanga* (widow marriage) and levirate marriages are widely practised by the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas*. The levirate is obligatory to the *Adivasis* and it is customary to the *Chhotoloks* and the *Musalmanas*. The *Sanga* and levirate marriages are strictly forbidden to the *Bhadraloks* as these are the customs of inferior people. The sororate is also customary among the *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis*. It is incidental to the *Musalmanas*. The *Bhadraloks* avoid it strictly and consider it non-honourable.

Keeping of *Ghar Jamai* (resident son-in-law) is preferred by the *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis*, especially by the families in which male heirs are absent. The status of the *Ghar Jamai* is like that of the own son. The *Bhadraloks* rarely keep *Ghar Jamai*. It is not honourable to keep *Ghar Jamai* in the part of the parents-in-law. It is of below dignity in the part of the bridegroom to remain as *Ghar jamai*.

The *Bhadraloks* do not permit divorce. Marriage is the bond of life. The widows are not allowed to remarry. They maintain a restricted life observing number of social taboos. The *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas* permit divorce. A

woman can be divorced easily. The divorce of course, requires the sanction of the panchayat of their own. The widow and divorced women may marry according to their choice. The high frequency of divorce among the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas* gives a very instable character of their marriage.

**Diet :** Dietary patterns are distinctive to each status group aggregate. The regular consumption of protein differentiates the *Bhadraloks* from the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmanas*. The latter three status group aggregates consume protein more on festive occasion or incidentally when fish becomes available from the paddy field in agricultural season. Besides, the *Bhadraloks* use more spices during cooking, regularly consume cow-milk, *ghee* (clarified butter), fruits of various kinds. These owe the general difference in food habits. This has relation of limited nature with superior or inferior position of the status group aggregates. The consumption of meat, fish and milk has relative importance to hierarchy (Srinivas, 1955, pp. 26-27). The cultural values dictate the food habits of a society and food habits are shaped by the ecology too.

There are several kinds of meat animals : goat, castrated goat, sheep, pig, fowl, duck and cow. Goat meat is superior to castrated goat or sheep. Meat of the sacrificed goat is superior than the non-sacrificed goat. Duck is superior to fowl. Pig is superior to beef. Thus there is a hierarchy of meat. The *Bhadraloks* eat goat-meat and seldom the meat of the castrated goat. The fowls and ducks are usually not taken publicly. The pigs and the beef are strictly forbidden. The *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* take all kinds of meat. The pigs are strictly forbidden to the *Musalmanas*. As the *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* are the fowl, duck, pig and beef eaters but not cow slaughterers they are given inferior status. Similarly the *Musalmanas* are considered as inferior because of their beef eating and cow slaughtering habits. Similarly, the *Bhadraloks* do not eat certain kind of native fishes, for instance, *chang*, *boal*, *sal* and *kutchla*; these fishes are taken by the other status group aggregates.

Milk is highly esteemed by the *Bhadraloks*. They habitually drink milk. The other three status group aggregates do not drink milk not because of the economic reason but because of cultural avoidance. Consumption of *ghee* (clarified butter) is another status-stricken food ingredient. It is not only an essential ingre-

dient in the rituals of the *Bhadraloks*. *Ghee* is highly esteemed as food. Guests are entertained with home-made refreshments prepared in *ghee*. The foods prepared with *ghee* is *pacca* food and pollution proof. It is not honourable to prepare refreshment in mustard oil. If guests are invited to take midday meal in any *Bhadralok's* house *ghee* is served at first with a spoon over the rice. In other three status group aggregates *ghee* is neither important in rutual occasion nor as food. Thus diet itself can differentiate the *Bhadraloks* from the other status group aggregates. Consumption of goat-meat, milk and *ghee* and avoidance of certain kinds of meat and fishes are the indicies of *Bhadralok's* superiority.

*Domestication of animals* : Herding of animals in one of the cultural factors which determines the position of the status group aggregate. The *Bhadraloks* keep cattle for two purposes : for regular supply of cow milk and the bullocks for ploughing lands and drawing carts. Goat is also kept for the milk which is considered very nourishing for children. Possession of milk-cow indicates possession of wealth. Cow is worshipped and is considered as goddess of wealth. Its possession owes prestige.

The *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* rarely possess milk-cow. Very few of them have bullocks for ploughing and drawing cart. They herd swine and fowl too. Herding of swine and keeping of hen is degrading. The *Musalmans* keep bullock and cow for trading and for salugtering on festive occasion. The trading with cattle is highly degrading profession to the Hindus.

*Sacrifice* : Sacrifice of animals before the deities are common in rural areas of West Bengal. The sacrificial animals differ from status group aggregate to status group aggregate. The way of sacrifice is also different. The *Bhadraloks* sacrifice goat in front of the deities. This sacrifice is symbolic. By sacrificing goat, the sacrificer intends to sacrifice the earthly passion (*Kama*). The *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* mostly sacrifice fowls and pigs to please the deities to obtain earthly pleasure. The goat is incidentally sacrificed. The *Bhadraloks* look down upon this motive of sacrifice and also consider it degrading to sacrifice fowl and pig in appeasing deities.

The method of sacrifice also varies in different status group aggregates. The *Bhadraloks* sever the head of the goat with a single strike of a sharp cutter (*Kharga*). This is called *Bali*.

Before the sacrifice the animal is bathed and the *Purahit* (priest) sprinkle holy water on the animal with holy enchantments. The *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* sacrifice the fowl by twisting its head in front of the deities. It is blood less sacrifice. Occasionally fowls are beheaded with sharp knife and blood is given to the deities in a container. The pigs are sacrificed by inserting red hot knife or spear-head in pectoral region.

*Commensal relations* : The pure becomes impure when both are brought together. Hence the *Bhadraloks* remain aloof from others as far as possible. The purer castes are easily defiled by the touch of the impure castes (Hutton, 1963). All relations of the *Bhadraloks* with other people of Benapur and the region are defined according to their pure and impure nature. There are substances which can easily be polluted by the touch of inferior status group aggregates. Its intensity and variability depend on the position of the status group aggregates, for instance water touched by the *Nabasakha* is pure while that of the *Chhotolok* is impure. The *Bhadraloks* never take either *kachha* or *pacca* food from the hands of the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmans*. The *Bhadralok* women even do not touch the *Chhotolok* or *Adivasi* women who come to serve as domestic maids. The *Chhotoloks* do not accept cooked rice, pulses and fishes from the *Adivasis*. But the *Adivasis* accept food from the *Chhotoloks*. The *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* take water from each others hands.

The *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* do not take food and water from the *Musalmans*. Similarly the *Musalmans* do not take food and water from their hands. This Benapur residents live in complex commensal relations. Ritual status is principally expressed in hierarchy of commensal relations (Mayer, 1956, pp. 120-121). The *Bhadraloks* consider them superior to all and do not accept water and any kind of food from the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmans*. On the contrary the *Chhotoloks* consider them superior to the *Adivasis*. Again the *Musalmans* neither consider the *Adivasis* nor the *Chhotoloks* superior to them. The Hindu philosophy of water and food acceptance has engulfed the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmans* in recent times (Douglas, 1966).

*Concept of disease and its treatment* : The *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* have a strange belief in supernaturalism. They think

that the disease is the resultant of the wrath of the spirits and evil acts of the sorcerers. This strange belief draws them towards the magical arts of curing the diseases. They rely on the *Gunni* or *Ojha* for identifying the spirits responsible for the disease or to identifying the envious person who has appointed the sorcerer to inflict the disease on them. *Telpanja* (divination) is performed by the *Gunni* to do this. The usual suggestive measure is to appease the discontent spirits by sacrifice. In case of sorcery the *Gunni* performs his magical feat to counteract the effect. In a very few cases herbal medicine or amulet is suggested for long term cure. When the *Gunni* fails to cure, they approach the village doctor. The *Bhadraloks* on the contrary rely on commercial medicine and on village doctor for any physical inconveniences. Failing to this they try the magical art as a last resort. The *Musalmans* mostly consult doctor for the treatment of diseases. They also consult *Gunni* when medicine fails.

*Consumption pattern* : The consumption patterns of the *Bhadraloks* differs from the rests. The *Bhadraloks* spend a considerable percentage of their income in educating their children, social ceremonies, purchase of luxury goods, medicine and fuel. On the contrary the *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmans* mostly spend their income in food and repayment of loans.

Therefore, it is observed that the *Bhadraloks* are culturally superior. There lies the hierarchy in status group aggregates. They occupy their status according to their secular and ritual positions. The ritual position of the *Bhadraloks* is consistent with their secular position.

#### INTERACTION (OVERVIEW)

The *Adivasi* is a closed status group. The membership of which is strictly determined by birth. Though the *Adivasis* are verbally differentiated from the *Chhotoloks* yet they suffer from equal disabilities like those of the *Chhotoloks*. Even their physical touch pollutes an adult *Bhadralok* person and bath is the only cleaning measure of it. If a member of the *Bhadraloks* enters into their hamlet which a member seldom does, is compelled by the convention to put-off and change his clothes and to wash hands and feet. Sometimes some take bath to wipe out pollution. The *Nabasakhas* also retain this type of restriction

to differentiate them from the *Adivasis*, even the Kalu, the Dhopa and the Sekra who belong originally to the *Chhotolok* group, in recent times maintain a distance from the *Adivasis*. The Dhopa does not wash their clothes, the Kalu and the Sekra seldom enter into the *Adivasi* hamlet. The other *Chhotoloks* of course, have connection with the *Adivasis* for mutual advantage and reciprocal interest. The *Chhotoloks* take lands from the *Adivasis* in tenancy, work in their lands as labourers and even hire plough from them for use. Sometimes reciprocity binds the two groups, two members and even two families in close economic ties (Sengupta, 1969a).

The *Adivasis* are divided into a number of exogamous clans each of which is named after an animal, plant or an inanimate objects. These are considered as the totem of the clans and are revered. A totem is never injured or killed. There are no differences in the statuses of clans.

The *Musalmanas* live in a separate hamlet of the village. They are living in almost complete isolation from the *Bhadralok* and the *Nabasakha* groups. The *Adivasi* and the *Chhotolok* groups have some amount of interaction with the *Musalmanas* in economic spheres. The Kalu, the Dhopa and the Sekra abstain from trespassing their hamlet. The *Adivasis* procure beef from the *Musalmana* by payment of cash or kind. Besides the *Musalmanas* are the tiller of lands like the *Adivasis* and the *Chhotoloks*. Some members of the *Adivasis*, sometimes get lands from the *Musalmanas* in tenancy and also render labour in the fields of the *Musalmanas*. The *Chhotolokas* too, till the lands of the *Musalmanas*. The *Musalmanas* on the other hand sometimes till the lands of the *Bhadraloks*, take care of their palm-tree which yield palm-juice. But their entry into the campus of *Bhadralok* houses are strictly guarded.

The *Nabasakhas* too, retain similar rigid prohibition. Thus the *Musalmanas* get no service in socio-ritual spheres from the Hindus of all status group aggregates and the *Adivasis* excepting in some economic spheres. Thus the *Musalmanas* live in social isolation. The *Bhadralok* doctor of the village for his professional etiquette has to withdraw certain amount of rigidity from the usual restrictions which the *Bhadraloks* prescribe for the *Musalmanas*. The village doctor also takes bath and

wears washed clothes after attending the call to a *Musalmana* house. Whenever a *Musalmana* attends the dispensary of the village doctor he sits apart from all the patients and he is attended by the doctor separately. The *Bhadraloks* and the *Nabasakhas* take their seats in the dispensary in a single bench allotted for them. But the *Chhotolok* and the *Adivasis* take seats together in a separate place in the verandah on the floor.

## CHAPTER V

### CLASS AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

#### I

Very often Indian villages are clearly differentiated in terms of the ownership, control and use of lands so that, in addition to peasant proprietors subsisting mainly by family labour, there are other classes both above and below. Where a community includes non-cultivating owners at one end and share-croppers and landless labourers at the other, the application of the term "peasantry" may seem misappropriating (Beteille, 1974, p. 25). The problems of land and its utilization for productive purposes are central to the study of agrarian system. It is important to understand agrarian class structure because there is still no satisfactory theory which can explain why various types of peasant associations have developed in certain places and not in others (Mencher, 1974, p. 1495). Wolf (1969, pp. 292-293) asserts importance to middle and poor free peasants who are not constrained by any power domain constitute the groupings for peasant uprising. The revolutionary potential of the peasants is reinforced by any factor. But this cannot sensibly explain Indian situation. Mencher (1974, pp. 1495-1502) has rightly pointed out that the peasant organisations in India have formed with a large agricultural labour class where strong polarisation between landless and others exists.

Differential evaluation of the different types of work is found in all societies but the work is allotted to different workers according to their task performance capacities. This allotment of work is dependent on various institutional factors. The institutional factors are not based on the requirement of work, as such, nature of work is not strictly determined by the kind of work that requires to be done. The work of agricultural community is centered round the ownership, control and use of lands (Beteille, 1974, p. 30).

The functional view explains stratification merely describing the division of labour. In India there are differ-

ent modes of productive organisation. Three main patterns of productive organisation are family labour, hired labour, and tenancy in a broad sense. The same work, is organised along different patterns which are dependent on ecological variations, crop patterns and work cycle. When production is organised on the basis of family labour it is noted that all family members do not do same kind of work. The work is performed according to sex and age. Sex and age-based division of labour is dependent on ecology and crop patterns and also on the acceptance of agricultural innovation. Further, the production based on family labour also requires help of the outside members in terms of reciprocity or on payment of work either on cash or kind. Again the division of family labour on sex and age basis is of different types when they cultivate lands as share-croppers or workers on others lands.

Tenancy and share-cropping introduce the relationship of at least two different families, those of the landowners and of the tenants or share-croppers. The two sets of people are linked together by rights, duties and obligations which show a wide range of variations. Similarly, the ratio of income from lands vary considerably between the landowners and tenants or share-croppers. Again this ratio vary much more between the landowners and the day-labourers.

The different modes of productive organisation stress the study of an important aspect of social stratification. The production based on family labour, hired labour and tenancy leads me to consider about the landowners, owner-cultivators, share-croppers and agricultural labourers. These categories and their mutual relations constitute the agrarian hierarchy. The villages in West Bengal are predominantly agricultural and agrarian hierarchy is the crucial feature of the social system. Therefore, to understand the caste-based hierarchy, the understanding of the nature and forms of agrarian hierarchy are important. In the villages under study, the people divide themselves in number of categories built around the ownership, control and use of lands. These categories exist side by side with the caste divisions. The people of the villages divide them on the basis of their relations with the productive system. These categories are variously named in local vocabularies such as, *Malik* or *Manib* (owner-supervisor), *Mahajan* (owner supervisor and creditor), *Jotedar* (non-

cultivating owner), *Bhagchasi* or *Bhag krishan* (share-cropper), *Sanjachasi* or *Sanja krishan* (contract cultivator), *Din-majur* or *Chhut krishan* (day-labourer), *Baramasi-majur* or *Nagare* (seasonal or contractual labourer) and so forth. The nature and name of these categories vary ecologically. However, these categories may be considered here as 'classes' not in an abstract sense and as a formal scheme but as a system of social relations. Therefore, the 'classes' here means the categories used by the people themselves to relate them in the productive organisation according to their own perception and conception.

The rural social stratification is envisaged here to note how the people themselves represent their social hierarchies. Social inequalities in India, is not only resultant effect of the existential differences in wealth, power and privilege but also it is associated with 'values'. Culture is the product of systematised 'values'. This means it has both a material as well as an ideological aspect. These two aspects influence each other though the inequality based on social 'values' is not determined by its material basis in every point. In rural West Bengal the important material basis of inequality is the distribution of land. Myrdal (1968, p. 569) rightly pointed out that inequality is a question of landownership. Status, leisure and authority are associated with it. Differences in income is considered as less significant factor. It is true that in rural West Bengal, a small section of people own and control much of lands and there is numerically significant landless agricultural people. A large section of people are tenants though law discourages tenancy.

Dumont and Pocock (1957, p. 25) and many others suggest that the village as a unit of study is inadequate as it represents no sociological reality. They are of opinion that the village unity is largely an artificial creation. The only reality is the relationship of the dominant and the dependent castes. Therefore, the caste is the proper unit of study and not the village. Bailey (1959, pp. 88-101) writes in a rejoinder pointing out many kinds of relationships in the village which may be studied independent of caste and for what the village provides an adequate framework. However, series of village studies give us detailed accounts of different castes, the functional interdependence and also hierarchical arrangements. It is also true that for considering the productive system, emphasis is laid

on the relationships of landowning castes and the landless castes, tacitly ignoring the relationships of the landowners and landless as the two classes of people. Even with regard to distribution of the power, the concept of dominant caste is used (Srinivas, 1955, Mayer, 1956). There is no doubt that certain relationship exists between the hierarchy of power and caste system, but it is a fanciful idea to conceive this relationship in every case. The studies of Srinivas (1962, pp. 63-69) and Beteille (1965) and finally Dumont (1966) pointed out that *jati* is an operative unit as a structural and segmentary system. Further these studies showed empirically the opposition of purity and pollution, problem of caste ranking, nature and types of caste mobility and the forms of dependence and dominance of the castes. But it is my point of venture to discuss about some other important features of rural Indian society other than caste.

Classes are units in a system of relationships. Thorner (1956, p. 2) points out that the agrarian structure is after all not an external framework within which various classes function, rather it is the sum total of the ways in which each group operates in relation to other groups. Beteille (1974, p. 46) considers that the study of class has to deal with two sets of problems : problems of distributions and interrelationships. Marxists laid primary significance to agrarian class relations. They do not confine their interest to the problems of distribution but take primary importance to the nature of relations between classes. They consider the relations as relations of the conflict.

By class I mean rural categories of Indian villagers. These categories are not exhausted by castes. The villagers relate themselves in significant ways in these categories which I conceive here as classes. Mencher (1974, p. 1947) argues that the relations in the village are very different, depending on whether one is involved with small, middle or large landowner. Furthermore, there is no commonly used term for 'poor' or 'lower class', though unquestionably such a class exists. Therefore, she does not look at, how people define things for themselves but how data actually look on the ground. Her purpose of study and that of mine are quite opposite. Like Dumont, I believe that the best way of understanding the social relation is the villagers' way of identifying and categorising them. Most of the villagers are conscious that the landownership is associated with wealth,

power and privilege. The landowners and the landless have different interest and different *style of life*. Thorner (1962, pp. 4-6) classifies a threefold divisions of agricultural populations into *malik* (proprietor), *kisan* (working peasant) and *majdur* (labour). It gives the idea how people classify themselves with regard to the nature of work they perform and the kind of property they own. On the basis of the nature of work and ownership, the villagers classify themselves in rural categories, which significantly also point out the nature of relations between these categories. The categories can be defined here in terms of ownership, control and use of property as lands and these are the most fundamental basis of social cleavage. Here, I conceive of these categories as class in local terms rather than in global terms because the organised class consciousness is absent here. Under this circumstance, if these categories are considered in local terms, they provide the important features of rural social life.

## II

It is pointed out earlier that *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* are predominantly the agricultural villages. The people draw their subsistence mainly from paddy cultivation. Lands in *Kotaigarh* are owned sizeably by the upper castes. In *Benapur* major portion of lands is under the control of the *Bhadraloks*. All the castes and tribes of *Kotaigarh* excepting the Chhatris and the Moiras, participate in paddy cultivation. All the status group aggregates in *Benapur* take part in paddy cultivation. The primary means of production is *Jami* or lands. The villagers are related with the means of production grossly into two ways : as the owners of the means of production i.e. landowners (*Mahajan* or *Jotedar*) and individuals who work on their lands i.e. non-owners (*Chasi* or *Krishan*). Thus first cleavage occurs among the villagers on the basis of ownership and control over lands.

The villagers receive their income having been related with the paddy cultivation in various ways. These various relations, the villagers themselves perceive, recognise and classify them into number of categories. I encounter seven categories of people to paddy cultivation : non-cultivating owner (*Jotedar*), owner-supervisor (*Malik* or *Mahajan*), owner-cultivator (*Chasi* or *Krishan*), Share-cropper (*Bhagchasi* or *Bhag krishan*), contract cultivator (*Sanjachasi* or *Sanja krishan*), contractual labourer (*Bara-*

, *masi-majur* or *Nagare*) and day labourer (*Din-majur* or *Chhut krishan*). The modes of production distinguish these categories or classes from one another. It is noted that the landowners are distinguished into three categories or classes in *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur*: the *Jotedar*, the *Mahajan* and the *Chasi* or *Krishan*.

The *Jotedar* or non-cultivating owners live on receiving rents in the form of crops on the lands let out for share-cropping, form a specific category. A few of them live in cities or towns and others live in villages. They rent out their lands to the *Bhag-chasi* or *Bhagkrishan* (share-croppers). Occasionally they offer their lands to the *Sanja chasi* or *Sanja krishan* (contract cultivators) and receive a fixed income as rent in the form of crops which is previously settled and agreed upon. They pay only the land-tax, and the labour and capital are provided by the share-croppers and the contract cultivators.

The *Mahajan* or owner supervisors are the village residents. They do not cultivate their lands personally but indirectly remain attached to lands contributing personal supervision over the hired labourers. This category or class can be equated with the *Jotedar* (non-cultivating owners) but these two categories or classes differ from one another by the fact that the *Mahajan* or *Malik* (owner supervisors) spare much time after agricultural pursuits for supervision and exert personal influence on the technology of production with capital. On the other hand the *Jotedar* (non-cultivating owners) neither contribute personal supervision nor exert influence over the share-croppers or contract cultivators having no control over the capital. They are dependent on *technical lore* of the share croppers or contract cultivators. The *Mahajan* (owner-supervisors) also give their far-off lands of inferior quality to the share-croppers or contract cultivators. Even then, they provide the bullock, plough, manure and seeds only limiting the contribution of the share-croppers and the contract cultivators to their labour. At the time of receiving rent the seed grains are retrieved from the harvested paddy.

The *Chasi* or the *Krishan* (owner cultivators) are the actual peasants. They directly engage in cultivation contributing self-labour, family-labour and employ hired labourer as assistance when needed. The hired labourers are employed if the *Chasi* or *Krishan* (own cultivators) possess sizeable lands or family labour becomes inadequate.

The *Bhagchasi* or *Bhagkrishan* (share-croppers) cultivate others lands and for use of their lands they pay rents in grains to the landowners. The total outturn of the year is divided equally among the *Bhagchasi* and the landowners. In case of good yield the landowners receive good share and in case of bad yield they suffer from poor payment. The agricultural risk is thus shared among the *Bhagchasi* and the landowners. The *Sanja chasi* or *Sanja krishan* on the other hand, also cultivate others lands and pay contracted rents in grains to the landowners. The landowners let out their lands with a contract of fixed amount of rent which is agreed upon at the time of distribution of the lands. In case of good yield, the *Sanja chasi* gains and he loses at bad harvest. The agricultural risk is not shared among the *Sanja chasi* and the land-owner. The former bears the risk of his own.

The *Din-majur* or *Chhut krishan* (day-labourers) are appointed on daily wage basis. They are appointed as hired labourers by the owner-supervisors (*Mahajan*), owner-cultivator (*Chasi* or *Krishan*) for cultivating their lands. They usually do all the operations of paddy cultivations starting from ploughing to harvest. The *Baramasi-majur* or *Nagare* (seasonal or contractual labourers) are appointed for the season or more. They also perform all the operations of agriculture. The only difference between the *Din-majur* or *Chhut krishan* and the *Baramasi-majur* or *Nagare*, is the latter's security of appointment for a season or more, while the former move from door to door for every day appointment.

However, the terminologies of these categories or classes depend on the nature of work, they perform and the terms of contract in services. The nature and composition of each category and reciprocal rights, duties and obligations which prevail among themselves and bring them close to one another are discussed in course of the study. Many legal and quasi-legal terms involve in it.

The owners and non-owners of land at *Kotaigarh* can be viewed from the table 8. This shows all the families of the Sadgop, the Brahman, the Kumhar and the Tambuli castes are land owners. It is seen that the Tambuli are the sizeable land-holder of *Kotaigarh*. The other castes like the Mahisya, the Solanki and the Kayastha have small percentage of non-owners. The Chhatri and the Moira are clinged to their traditional occupations and not agriculturists in any way. The Bhumijas and the Mahalis

are the major landless agricultural labourers of the village. Similarly in *Benapur*, the *Bhadraloks* are the sizeable owners. All of them are owners. The major non-owners are the *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis*. They do the works of the agricultural labourers of the village (vide table 24).

The majority of the lands in both the villages are self-farmed either by own labour or by supervision. The tenants are largely employed in the land when it is inaccessible to self-farming group either being economically handicapped or in want of labourers in the village. Some owners hold small plots of land and it seems unworthy by such owners to provide bullocks or other equipments which are costly possessions. Some offers land to the share-croppers to avoid close contact with the labourers and to retain prestigious *style of life*. When the owners reside outside the villages they invariably lease out the lands.

Landholding is associated with status. In general the higher castes or the *Bhadraloks* are the sizeable landowners and the lower castes or the *Chhotoloks*, and most of the aborigines like the *Bhumijas*, the *Mahalis* and the *Santals* provide the services of the landless labourers and share-croppers. The landholding is not only the monopoly of a particular caste in *Kotaigarh*. It is distributed among many castes only with little more acres to the hands of the higher castes. The higher landowning castes do not participate in ploughing. The lower castes, and the aborigines like the *Bhumijas* and the *Mahalis* provide this service in majority.

Investment in land is a regular feature in *Benapur*. The *Chhotoloks* and the *Adivasis* hold such an insufficient quantity of land that they have to seek land in tenancy or to offer their services to others field as agricultural labourers for more earning. Although lands are distributed among many status group aggregates yet demand of agricultural labourers or share-croppers in the village never comes at a standstill point.

The agricultural economy of *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* involves the nature and processes of production and the interactions of different categories of people both within and outside the village. Here, the attention is paid in the short résumé of the nature and extent of productions and the considerations of the relations which come into existence to the members of the village among themselves and with the outsider for the purpose of productions. This interaction of different people is a network of social rela-

tions in one hand and this also creates cleavage on the other hand.

It has already been mentioned that the village economy is principally based on agriculture and there are seven categories of persons related in different ways to the process of agriculture. At *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* there are also certain village crafts and services and these embrace the traditional economy of land and grain, though it is seen that the castes and status group aggregates other than traditionally associated with agriculture also contribute to it in some way or other. The relations between the artisans and servicing groups and different categories of people involving in agriculture have been enfeebled owing to relevant changes in and around the villages. They are gradually acquiring the contractual character. Many new earning sources have been emerging in recent years in addition to the traditional occupations (Sengupta, 1973).

Production implies relations of many persons having more or less specific duties and obligations to one another. The mutual relationships between the different categories of people, engaged in agriculture are governed by many legal and quasi-legal terms in addition to traditional norms and sanctions.

Thus this is seen that the agricultural economy involves, a process of segmentation among the villagers in broad categories. These segments or categories are open systems. The segmentary system starts with ownership and non-ownership of lands. The land-owner as a segment or category has no homogeneous and sharply defined character. Almost all the castes at *Kotaigarh* and status group aggregates in *Benapur* possess either small or appreciable amount of land. The common practice of insufficient holder or landless persons are now to invest in land, this is plausible owing to the extension of market-oriented economy, coming of land more frequently in the market and also due to certain recent political changes (Gough, 1955 and Bailey, 1957).

None of the villages possesses no big landowners in truest sense of the term. It is a common practice of the sizeable owners to keep their lands in the title of the names of the different members of their families and occasionally in the names of persons who may be outside of their households. Hence it is a difficult task to put a practice and quantitative estimation of the ownership and concentration of lands. Besides, there are non-resident

landowners although their numbers are very low; many landowners have lands in other villages. These do not permit more than approximation of quantitative analysis.

In *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur*, five kinds of relationships grow around the rural categories or classes attached to agricultural processes in some way or other. In the first hand the relationship emerges between the *Jotedar* (non-cultivating owners) or *Mahajan* (owner-supervisors) and the *Bhagchasi* or *Bhagkrishan* (share-croppers); secondly, the relationship between the *Jotedar* (non-cultivating owners) or *Mahajan* (owner supervisors) and the *Sanja chasi* or *Sanja krishan* (contract cultivators); thirdly, the relationship between the *Mahajan* and the *Din-majur* or *Chhut krishan* (day labourers); fourthly, the relationship between the *Mahajan* and the *Nagare* or *Baramasi majur* (contractual or seasonal labourers) and the fifth relationship is seen to grow between the *Chasi* or *Krishan* (owner-cultivators) and the *Din-majur* or *Chhut krishan* (day labourers). Each of these relationships is either contractual or non-contractual in character. The contractual relationship is durable than the non-contractual. Again each of these relationships is either conflictual or cooperative. The latter one is seen to continue and is renewed whenever necessary while the former one is ceased to act at the first opportunity in the part of the employers (Sengupta, 1969c). The *Bhagchasi* or *Bhag krishan*, the *Sanja chasi* or *Sanja krishan*, the *Baramasi majur* or *Nagare* come in contractual relationship with the land-owners. The relationship of the *Din-majur* or *Chhut krishan* and the landowners is non-contractual type.

The relationships of the *Bhagchasi-Jotedar* or the *Bhagchasi-Mahajan* continue to exist mainly for two reasons. Firstly the *Jotedar* has little scope for personal supervision, he offers land to the tenant at first hand and equally divides the share after the harvest. Secondly, majority of the *Mahajan* employ hired labourers and a few let out their lands to the *Sanja chasi* on fixed rate to avoid the risk of running a strenuous and uncertain production being involved in cultivation and they think that this work is derogatory to their prestige and *style of life*.

In recent years the relationship between the landowners and the agricultural labourers become repressive and strained, owing to some political campaign in the region. Thus landowners are sometimes hesitate to appoint the labourers under personal super-

vision and also try to avoid close relations with them over whom their control has become uncertain. The best outlet from the situation is to offer the lands on fixed rent to some one with whom the contacts are of a limited and formal nature. It may be one of the causes for separation between ownership of land and its actual use.

There is a kind of status affixed to the cultivation by supervision. It confers some prestige to the persons than those who actually directly involve in cultivation. The owner cultivator generally owns a small plot of land which he cultivates wholly or mainly by his labour and capital or that of his family. He usually does not hire labour. Only in the case of insufficient labour of a single family and on the occasion of transplanting and harvesting he hires labour, this may be reciprocal labour. Sometimes poor own-cultivator borrows capital from the capable owner-cultivators or owner-supervisors (*Malik* or *Mahajan*). The owner-cultivator occasionally offers a portion of land to the tenants either being economically handicapped or being devoid of man-power in the form of family labour or hired labour. Thus man-power and capital are two factors which enforce the owner-cultivator to offer their lands to the *Bhagchasi* or the *Sanja chasi*. A man gives his land to a *Bhagchasi* because he is unable to work it himself. Very occasionally a rich man will allow a poorer man as a favour to share-crop a field, but usually it is a necessity which drives the owner to let some one else do the work (Bailey, 1958, p. 117). Again in case of insufficient holding many persons of this category contribute their labour to others fields as labourers or take land in tenancy from others either to cultivate directly by self-labour or to cultivate by hired labourers under personal supervision. Thus it is seen that the owner-cultivator sometimes let out the land like the *Jotedar* or the *Mahajan*. Again he owns a small plot of land and cultivates it. In certain cases he shares his labour with the agricultural labourers and when he takes the land for share-cropping he indirectly controls the labourers in the fields by personal supervision like the *Mahajan*. Here it is noted that the owner-cultivator merges with the owner-supervisors in occasion.

It is noted that the *Jotedar* are invariably dependent on the share-croppers for tilling of lands. The share-croppers are the major complements to them. They contribute seed grains, plough

bullocks, labour etc. The *Mahajan* are similarly dependent on the hired labourers and the share-croppers. Only difference is that the latter give seed grains, plough, bullocks on occasion with their casual visit at the harvesting and threshing operations for demanding and assessing actual share.

The *Mahajan* employ both share-croppers and agricultural labourers, according to their personal benefits and needs. On the contrary the *Chasi* or owner-cultivator depends for cultivation mostly to self-labour, and hired labourers. The main difference between the *Mahajan* and the *Chasi* is that the former participates and when he takes the land for share-cropping he indirectly contributes self-labour in tilling the soil. The latter also seeks land from the owners of all categories and they themselves do the job of the tenants and the labourers.

Bulk of the people who engage in agricultural work either have insufficient holding or possess no lands. They naturally work on the lands owned by others and as such a net work of economic or social relations have grown up between the different categories of people ignoring the barrier of the caste and the status group aggregate. These owners of insufficient holding and non-owners can be divided into two broad categories : the share-croppers and the agricultural labourers. This has already been indicated early that these categories like the other aforesaid categories are conceptually separate entities but constitutionally not a concrete homogeneous group of individuals. A person may be a owner of very small plot of land in one hand and share-cropper on the other hand. A share-cropper may be an agricultural labourer to others fields. Owing to these multiple affiliation of the same person to a number of categories he often oscillates between two contradictory interests and thus prevents the growth of class-centrism. This also liquidates the class range, focuss and the intensity of class-interest.

The categories of owner-cultivator (*Chasi*), the share-cropper (*Bhagchasi*) and the different agricultural labourers are dynamic in nature. There is a constant rotation of personnel in different categories. As for instance, an owner-cultivator in one year, happens to be a share-cropper in the next year owing to passing out of his land for heavy debts to a creditor, who is generally a sizeable landowner of the village. Similarly an agricultural labourer could be a share-cropper and vice-versa. Hence it is found

that these categories are not a closed system, the entry and out are considerably going on. An individual at a time belongs to one or more categories and shortly pass from one to another and thus enfeebles the class-consciousness, of course conflicts and disputes between people of different categories are of daily occurrence in the villages. But these are between the people of respective categories involve in the relationship of interdependence.

The recent policy of the Government is to abandon the non-cultivating owners and many legal sanctions are enacted as a measure against of these tenancies. In both the villages the tenants and the land owners are acquainted to each other and for mutual benefit, conceal their relationship to the strangers. The tenants are usually retaining informal relationship and it is difficult to ascertain who are working as hired labourers and who are tenants, as the resident land-owners are paying regular supervision in the fields.

The relationship of the *Bhagchasi* or the *Bhag krishan* (share-croppers) and the *Jotedar* or the *Mahajan* (landowners) is not stable. On average it stays from two to three years. Change of share-croppers is frequent. The relationship of the share-cropper and the landowner has quasi-legal bonds being subjected to the jurisdiction of courts. Theoretically the establishment of lessor and lessee bonds are made by signing a lease-deed by both the parties. The registrar keeps the copy of this. Practically this lease-deed is not signed. The traditional usage and sanction regulate the relationship of the lessor-lessee and execution of written code is a gospel. Disputes between the lessor and lessee are not taken to courts. There are two points round which the conflict grows between the lessor and the lessee. These are the share of produce to be taken by each and security of the share-cropper's tenure. There is legislation for these but it hardly plays any role in the village. Both the share of produce and the security of tenure depend on the faith and honesty of the tenants and the good-will of the owners. The eviction of the share-cropper is mainly due to failure in the part of the share-cropper for full payment or habitual concealment of the actual produce or refusal to pay the fixed amount agreed upon.

The caste barrier plays no role in appointing the share-croppers and almost all the castes and status group aggregates offer lands in share-cropping. But the higher castes or *Bhadraloks*

differ in motives from the castes of low status. The upper castes and the *Bhadraloks* on average hold more lands than any other castes and status group aggregates. Most of these families lease their lands to avoid contacts with the agricultural labourers which they think will create hinderance in maintaining their desirous *style of life* and prestige. But on the other hand the castes of the lower status and the *Chhotoloks* having small holding lease their lands in want of capital in the form of seeds, plough, cattle and other agricultural equipments.

## II

The paddy cultivation system and the rural class relations in *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* reveal a few interesting points. Firstly, the landholding as a measure of class position is used for studying the class relations. The uneven distribution of lands tends to emerge out paddy cultivation types with characteristics of each : (i) family big holding, (ii) family small holding, (iii) family size tenancy and (iv) non-owning cultivation types. Secondly, the data on the family size of farm units confuse family small holding with family size tenancy. A high percentage of non-owning cultivators and small holding families are involved in family-size tenancy.

In both the villages the class structure varies in two main ways : (i) the criteria of differentiating the landowner upper castes or *Bhadraloks* and others and (ii) the quality and quantity of cultural, political and organisational life of the landowner upper castes or *Bhadraloks* and the others (the lower castes or the *Chhotoloks*, the *Adivasis* and the *Musalmans*). There are two main criteria by which the agricultural categories or classes are different from one another. Firstly, the legal privileges and secondly the *style of life*. Likewise, the technical culture of cultivation, political activation and organisation, qualitatively differentiate the agricultural categories or classes from one another.

These tend to emerge four characteristics of rural class structures having variable relations of the villagers with paddy cultivations as a main productive enterprise. Firstly, the legal privileges differentiate the classes. The *Jotedar* (non-cultivating owner) and the *Bhagchasi* or the *Bhag krishan* (share-cropper); the *Mahajan* (owner-supervisor) and the *Baramasi-major* or the *Nagare* (contractual or season labourer); the *Dinmajur* or the *Chhut krishan*

(day labourer) and the *Sanja chasi* or the *Sanja krishan* (contract cultivator) all are differentiated by legal privileges.

Secondly, *style of life* differentiates the agrarian classes from one another. The upper caste landowner or *Bhadraloks* refrain from tilling the lands. They do involve in shopkeeping and white-collar jobs and professions. Their women do not take part in productive system with the men. The children go to school and the education is highly appreciated in their families. They try to keep joint families. They do not marry their widows and avoid levirate, sororate and cross-cousin marriages. They do not herd swine and keep hen and cock. They never eat beef and unclean meat. Again, they observe sanskritic rituals. In contrast the lower caste or the *Chhotolok* and the *Adivasi* share-croppers (*Bhagchasi* or *Bhag krishan*), the contractual or the seasonal labourers (*Baramasi majur* or *Nagare*) and the day labourers (*Dinmajur* or *Chhut krishan*) do manual work and till lands. Their women take part in productive activities almost equally with the men; the children also earn according to their capacity. They live in nuclear families, herd swine, eat pig, occasionally beef and observe non-sanskritic rituals.

Thirdly, the classes differ in the distribution of the technical culture of cultivation. The upper castes or the *Bhadraloks*, the *Jotedar* (non-cultivating owner), the *Mahajan* or the *Malik* (owner-supervisor) are incapable of cultivating their lands and as a result fail to impose decision on cultivation as most of them depend on the *technical lore* of the lower castes or the *Chhotolok krishan* or the *Chasi* (cultivator of lands) and the *Adivasis* (provider of labour for cultivation).

Fourthly, the agrarian classes differ in their degree of political activity and organisation in their sensitivity or non-reaction to political issues, in their intra-class communication and organisation and in their degree of political education and competence (Mrs. Sengupta, 1974). The *Din-majur* or the *Chhut krishan* (day labourers) in *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur* respectively raise voice against the *Mahajan* (owner supervisor) and the *Jotedar* (non-cultivating owner) for poor payment of wage, whereas, the *Bhag-chasi* or the *Bhag krishan* (share-cropper) and the *Sanja chasi* or the *Sanja krishan* (contract cultivator) react against this move and tend to resist the *Din-majur* or the *Chhut krishan* (day labourer). The *Jotedar* (non-cultivating owner), the *Mahajan* (owner

supervisor) as members of the upper castes or *Bhadraloks* are united by the common cultural and educational attainment and common threat against their existence by the appointed non-owning cultivators like the *Din-majur* and the *Chhut krishan*. The *Chhut krishan* or the *Din majur* (day labourer), the *Nagare* or the *Baramasi majur* (the seasonal or contractual labourer), the *Bhagchasi* or the *Bhag krishan* (share-cropper), the *Sanjachasi* or the *Sanja krishan* (contract cultivator) having multicaste affiliation and different cultural and educational attainments are segmented among themselves. This situation leads me to consider the study of agrarian class relations through paddy cultivation types.

*Family big holding type* : In this type the villagers are related with the cultivation in three different ways : *non-cultivating owner*, *owner-supervisor* and *owner-cultivator*. The villagers of the former division is classed as *Jotedar* and the latter two as *Mahajan* and *Chasi* or *Krishan* respectively. The *Jotedar* and the *Mahajan* belong to the upper caste or the *Bhadralok* category and the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* belong to lower caste or the *Chhotolok* category and the other communities like the *Adivasi* and the *Musalmana*. The *Mahajan* are the owners of more sizeable lands than the *Chasi* or the *Krishan*. The *Mahajan* and the *Jotedar* depend for cultivation of their lands on the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* (share-cropper), the *Sanja krishan* (contract cultivator), the *Chhut krishan* or the *Din majur* (day labourer) and the *Nagare* or the *Baramasi majur* (seasonal or contractual labourer). The three classes, the *Mahajan*, the *Jotedar* and the *Krishan* or the *Chasi* have the similar legal privilege on lands. The tenural right is preserved by the courts and they have the same kind of disposal right on lands. But in *style of life* and social privileges they differ. The *Jotedar* and the *Mahajan* are culturally, politically and educationally superior to the *Chasi* or the *Krishan*. The *Jotedar* and the *Mahajan* both belong to upper caste or the *Bhadralok* category. Their *style of life* are relatively less differentiable though they belong to different castes. The *Krishan* or the *Chasi* on the other hand, differ among themselves in language, religious affiliation, in education, culture and political stand. The *Krishan* or the *Chasi* have varied cultural characteristics as they belong to different castes with different degrees of social distances from the upper castes or the *Bhadraloks*. Further, they also belong to tribal as well as the *Musalmana* communities with different cul-

ture, customary laws and religion. The tribals speak in tribal dialects (*Santali* and *Mundari*). Education of this class also varies with different degrees of sanskritization of its members and again, the political stand of the members of this class is determined by their different degrees of educational attainment, sanskritization, religious inclination, the economic background and the receiving capacity of the circulation of political ideology in the village. The *Mahajan* and the *Jotedar* have monopolised education by virtue of their economic dominance and cultural attainment. The women do not participate in productive roles and they work as social secretary of the families. The *Chasi* or the *Krishan* are relatively less inclined to education with low cultural background and economic ability. They speak in different dialects (the *Adivasi* speak in *Santali* and in *Mundari*) the *Chhotoloks* or the lower castes and the Muslims speak in unsophisticated Bengali vocabulary. They cultivate their lands by themselves and depend mostly on family labour and occasionally on hired labour in addition. The exchange of labour among neighbours give the character of reciprocity.

*Family small holding type* : In this type, the villagers are related with paddy production system in two different ways : the supervising cultivators (*Jotmalik*) and the owner cultivators (the *Chasi* and the *Krishan*). The normal holding is about the size which requires the work of two or three adults. The *Mahajan* appoint *Nagare*, *Chasi* or *Krishan* and *Chhut Krishan* or *Din majur* for cultivating their lands under their own supervisions, they also participate in less strenuous operations. The labour size is as good as two or three adults. These *Jote malik* belong to the upper castes or *Bhadralok* category and largely dependent on the non-owning cultivators (*Chhut krishan* or *Din majur*) and the owner cultivators (*Chasi* or *Krishan*) of meagre holding.

The *Chasi* or the *Krishan* on the other hand, cultivate their lands with family labour and because of small holding they also take lands from other *Mahajan* as *Bhagchasi* or *Bhag krishan* for additional paddy. Thus it is noted that the *Krishan* or the *Chasi* of small holding have affiliations with two or more classes at a time, which weaken the class consciousness and perception of class position by the individuals. The *Chasi* or the *Krishan* of small holding type equally have multicaste and multi-ethnic affiliations like the big holding type. The legal right varies considerably in

small holding type. The *Jote malik* and the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* have similar legal right with regard to *tenure*. But the *Krishan* or the *Chasi* when work as share-croppers (*Bhagchasi* or *Bhag krishan*) and contract cultivators (*Sanjachasi* or *Sanja krishan*) and as day labourers (*Chhut krishan* or *Din majur*) have different legal rights.

The *style of life* of the *Jote malik* and the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* differ considerably. The *Jotemalik* have distinct legal status and *style of life* but the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* have no distinct legal status for all kinds of lands they cultivate or *style of life*. The *Jote malik* as they belong to the upper caste or *Badrakal* category have certain amount of similarity in *style of life* having same economic and educational background. But the *Chasis* or *Krishans* who belong to the religious community like the *Musalmans*, the *Adivasis* and the *Hindus* differ culturally, economically and educationally. It is noted that the individuals rotate from the status of small holding to non-owners, from share-croppers to contract cultivators, from contract cultivators to day labourers and *vice versa*. Again, the *style of life* varies according to the individuals affiliation to the caste, religious or ethnic groups. The intra-class communication is weak owing to multi-class affiliation of the individuals at a time and because of multi-caste or multi-ethnic and multi-religious membership of the class members. The characterization of the political goal and level of political involvement is invisible. The perception of political ideology is dependent on education, economic background and on different degrees of attainment to sanskritization and religious superstition.

*Family-size tenancy* : In family-size tenancy type, the operative unit of agriculture is the family members. The land-ownership and right on lands rest with the rentiers, viz, the *Jotedar* (non-cultivating owner), the *Mahajan* (owner supervisor) and a few *Chasi* or *Krishan* (owner cultivator). The total output from the lands are shared by the rentiers and the share-croppers (the *Bhagchasi* or the *Bhag krishan* and the *Sanjachasi* or the *Sanja krishan*).

There are two classes of tenants, for instance the *Bhagchasi* or *Bhag krishan* and the *Sanjachasi* or *Sanja krishan*. They differ in legal privileges and also in paying rents to the landowners in

terms of paddy. In both the villages, this type of paddy cultivation enterprise is followed under certain conditions. *Firstly*, the land is distributed unequally in the villages which again is concentrated mainly to a particular sector and a sizeable section is landless or possesses meagre holding. The sizeable landowners mostly belong to the upper caste or *Bhadralok* category. *Secondly*, the land has moderate to high productivity and good market price. Moreover the land is the main source of living. *Thirdly*, the technology of paddy production is relatively traditional. The improved technology has little developed with insignificant use of chemical fertilizer, improved varieties of paddy seeds and implements, depending mainly on rain water irrigation. The cultivation is still labour-intensive. *Fourthly*, labour is relatively cheap and under threat of unemployment owing to moderate holding strength to the major landed section of villagers and *fifthly*, the period of production of crop is nine to ten months. In both the villages, the tenancy is limited to paddy cultivation.

In family size tenancy, the two families, at least are involved in productive organisation : the rentier and the cultivator. This paddy cultivation type tends to emerge the situation of conflict between these rentiers and the cultivators. There are many issues on which the conflict arises between the two. One is benefitted at the cost of others. If the rentier's rent in the form of paddy and straw can be lowered, the income of the cultivator increases or *vice versa*. The division of the production is settled between the rentier and the cultivator at the time of distribution of the land. The cultivator when takes land as a *Bhagchasi* or *Bhag krishan*, the production is shared equally between the rentier and the cultivator. But when the cultivator takes land as *Sanja chasi* or *Sanja krishan*, the production is shared between the rentier and the cultivator according to contract made and agreed upon previously, which varies from case to case and relative to fertility and location of the lands. However, the division of the production at the time of harvest is made in many ways : part-payment, concealment of total production of lands, delayed payment and the like, in the part of the cultivator round which the conflict generates.

Again, conflict generates over the distribution of risk of cultivation. The paddy cultivation is dependent on rain water. Therefore natural calamity like draught and flood, overrain or

delayed rain makes fluctuation in the amount of production. This creates pressure on the *Chasi* (cultivator). This risk influences the income of the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* (cultivator) more than the rentier in family size tenancy. This makes the income of the cultivators highly variable which in recent time contributes to their political sensitivity (Mrs. Sengupta, 1974). Further, this risk of cultivation engenders segmentation even among the tenant cultivator. The rich tenants who manage the tenancy of sizeable lands from the rentiers and who possess moderate holding of their own (they are sometimes identified as *Jotedar*), share a portion of loss and hardship with the rentiers. Thus they oppose their class interest to many of the same people who are poor and have received small plots of land from rentiers for cultivation. It is noted in both the villages that the cultivator families who possess moderate holding receive additional lands from the rentiers for cultivation as tenants beyond their basic holding and they thus not only oppose the interest of the tenants who have no personal holding, but also possess identical interest with the small holding cultivators.

It has already been mentioned that in family size tenancy type, there are two classes of tenants : the *Bhagchasi* or the *Bhag krishan* and the *Sanjachasi* or the *Sanja krishan*. They differ in legal privileges. The *Bhagchasi* or the *Bhag krishan* has cultivable legal rights on the lands. This legal right exists in principle but in practice, the rentiers invest capital in the form of seeds and farmyard manures for cultivation of their lands. No written deeds are made for giving lands to the tenants. The distribution of lands and share of production are settled verbally. On the other hand, the *Sanjachasi* or the *Sanja krishan* has no legal privileges and long term cultivable right on lands. The land is distributed each year verbally with fresh term and contract. Because of the recent tenancy act in West Bengal, the rentiers, try to keep supervision over the technology of production providing certain inputs to the *Bhagchasi* and the *Sanja krishan*. They never allow the same set of *Bhagchasi* and *Sanja krishan* to cultivate their lands for a considerable time limiting the distribution to them for one or two years, after which they resupply the land to the fresh tenants. They, thereby overcome the legal bindings to them and the safeguard of privileges to the tenants.

The classes, viz., the *Bhagchasi* and the *Bhag krishan* have no distinctive *style of living*. The *style of life* does differ on the basis of ethnic group membership. It is noted that both the classes have internal differences in *style of life*. Inter-class variation in *style of life* depends on the religious, ethnic or caste membership. Moreover, none of the classes is discrete and rigid in principle; rotation of individuals from one class to another and again the affiliation of same individual into two classes at a time are seen to occur. This situation prevents the growth of class interest feebling the political sensitivity and political activation.

*Non-owning cultivation* : There are four classes in this enterprise. These are the *Din majur* or the *Chhut krishan* (day labourers), the *Nagare* or the *Baramasi majur* (contractual or seasonal labourers), the *Bhagchasi* or the *Bhag krishan* (share-croppers) and the *sanjachasi* or the *sanja krishan* (contract cultivators). I have discussed already about the *Bhagchasi* and the *Sanja krishan* with regard to the family size tenancy. It has also been mentioned that the *Bhagchasi* or the *Sanja krishan* cultivate others lands under different conditions. A few individuals, because of their uneconomic holding take lands in addition from the rentiers for more earning. Again, number of individuals solely cultivate the rentiers' lands as being landless. These two types of tenants having the same legal privileges possess separate interests which facilitate the segmentation among the same class. However, the *Sanjachasi* and the *Bhag krishan* involved in non-owning cultivation type possessing no lands of their own solely depend on the rentiers' lands.

The *Chhut krishan* or the *Din majur* and the *Nagare* or the *Baramasi majur* have no legal privileges. The *Chhut krishan* or the *Din majur* and the *Nagare* or the *Baramasi majur* differ from one another in security of job. The *Nagare* or the *Baramasi majur* has security of job for one or more years and the *Chhut krishan* or the *Din majur* has to seek employment every day. In *style of life* inter-class difference is hardly noticeable in view of distinctiveness but intra-class difference is noted. *Life styles* differ according to the affiliation of the individuals with religious, ethnic and caste groups. Multiple affiliation of the individuals to two or more classes at a time and the rotation of individuals from one class to another are also the feature of the people involved in this enterprise.

### III

The characteristics of paddy cultivation types and structure of classes in *Benapur* and *Kotaigarh* are the indicative of the social inequality in agrarian classes. In this section I confine myself to review separately the characteristics of each paddy cultivation type and the characteristics of the class structure of it.

In family big holding type land is brought under cultivation by the *Jotedar* (non-cultivating owners), the *Mahajan* (owner supervisors) and by the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* (owner cultivators). All of them are related with production mechanism in some way or other and the production thus received is both consumed in the household and sold in the market. The *Jotedar* depends on the *Bhagchasi* or the *Bhag krishan* (share-croppers) for production of paddy, the *Mahajan* depends on the *Din majur* or the *Chhut krishan* (day labourers) and the *Nagare* or the *Baramasi majur* (contractual or seasonal labourers). They also depend partially to the *Bhagchasi* or the *Bhag krishan* and the *Sanjachasi* also. The *Chasi* or the *Krishan* (owner-cultivators) produce paddy with the help of the family labour and occasionally hired labourers on daily wage. The *Jotedar*, the *Mahajan* and the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* have legal right on the land and have legal protection. Production technology is traditional and capital is provided by the owner of lands. Land is rarely marketable as it is the main source of income of the villagers.

The class structure is characterised by the absence of differences in legal privileges but by the presence of great difference in the *style of life*. The technical culture is largely borne by the share-croppers, contract cultivators, day-labourers, contractual labourers or the farmers. Intra-class differences in *style of life* is not visible in *Mahajan* and *Jotedar* classes. But inter-class difference in *style of life* is noted among the members of the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* (owner cultivators) class. The difference is maintained as a member of the religious, ethnic or caste groups. Education level is high among the *Mahajan* and the *Jotedar* classes. The patterns of their rituals are sanskritic. Their involvements in white collar jobs and professions and business are noted. On the contrary, in *Chasi* or *Krishan* class, education level is low, their rituals are non-sanskritic in nature. Involvement in manual work of cultivation is high. High politicisation is visible in the *Mahajan* and the *Jotedar* classes but the *Chasi* or the *Krishan*

class is characterised by the low political activation and competence.

In family small holding type two classes are seen to emerge : the *Mahajan* and the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* same as family big holding type. The *Mahajan*, here depends on the hired labourers as *Din majur* or *Cihut krishan* and as *Nagare* or *Baramasi majur*. The *Chasi* or the *Krishan* cultivate their own lands with family labour and also cultivate others lands as tenants to overcome the deficit for uneconomic holding of their own. Technology of production is traditional. The class structure is characterised by the presence of differences in legal privileges and *style of life*. The legal privileges of the class members of the *Mahajan* and the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* classes is same but when the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* become related with the production simultaneously as the *Bhagchasi* or the *Sanja krishan*, the legal privilege differs. The *style of life* of the *Mahajan* is distinct and different from the *Chasi* or the *Krishan*. The intra-class differences are not visible in *Mahajan* class but noted in the *Chasi* or the *Krishan*. The technical culture is borne not by the *Mahajan* but by the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* on whom the *Mahajan* depends. The intra-class differences in *style of life*, multiple affiliation of the members of the *Chasi* or the *Krishan* class to two or more other classes prevent political activation.

In family-size tenancy type, those people are involved in cultivation who have negligible amount of holding or who possess no lands of their own. In this type small plots of highly valuable lands are cultivated by the families who share their production with the rentiers for their own use and market. Two classes of people are related with this type of cultivation : the *Bhagchasi* or the *Bhag krishan* (share-croppers) and the *Sanja chasi* or the *Sanja krishan* (contract cultivators). The tenants of either of these classes virtually depend on the family labour.

The class structure is characterised by the absence of difference in legal privileges in practice but in principle they do differ. Inter-class difference in *style of life* is not perceptible but intra-class difference is noted. Because of multiple affiliation of the class members to two or more classes and rotation of members from one class to another class in a short interval and because of various affiliation of the class members to different religious-ethnic or caste groups, the perceptibility of class interest and poli-

tical activation are weak but not absent. The technical culture of paddy production is borne by them.

The non-owning cultivation type is characterised by involvement of the people of four classes : the share-croppers (*Bhag-chasi* or *Bhag krishan*), contract cultivators (*Sanjachasi* or *Sanja krishan*), day labourers (*Din majur* or *Chhut krishan*) and the contractual labourers (*Nagare* or *Baramasi majur*). The share-croppers and the contract cultivators share their production with the rentiers in fixed terms. The day labourers and the contractual labourers work upon others lands on payment of wages daily or for a season. The contractual labourers are appointed for a year or more and the day labourers are appointed every day on daily wage.

The structure of the classes is characterised by the absence of difference in legal privilege and *style of life*. The perceptible intra-class differences in *style of life* because of multi-caste, multi-religious and multi-ethnic affiliations of the class members weaken the intra-class communication. The weak intra-class communication makes the class members non-sensitive to political activity. Again, high rate of competition for land and employment generates intra-class rivalry which has been tuning down the political activation and weakening the political sensitivity.

#### IV

In normal times this structure stimulates the non-owners to become conscious about their position in village economy, but the landowners by merit of their control over lands and employments prevent the growth of class-consciousness and class ultimately turns into class 'in itself' rather than class 'for itself'. The other factors preventing the growth of class-consciousness are indistinct class-position and double affiliation of persons into two classes at a time or frequent changes of class affiliation in a short interval. The incoming of the non-agricultural castes and tribes into paddy cultivation creates competition and rivalry among themselves for lands. The dominant class (landowner) members discharge their share-croppers, labourers for minor misunderstanding among them and demand much favour and service from the newly appointed persons. This situation is anticipated by competition for land among the villagers. It is a common feature in the village that the tenant of one year turns into a day labourer in the

next year and *vice versa*. Again, the cultivators of meagre possession do the job of tenants and day labourers as offered to them. These indistinct class-position prevent the growth of class consciousness and "true class interest" (Sengupta, 1972, pp. 48-56).

The 'cultivation' is followed by almost all the castes and the tribes. The cultivation has various shades of prestige. The landowners who mainly live on the production from lands do not directly involve in the job of tilling, get high prestige from the possession of land as capital. Those who are associated with tilling gain low prestige. Again the job of owner-cultivators is more prestigious than the work of the tenants for the possession of lands by the former. On the contrary, the labourers get low prestige than the tenants.

However, twenty informants (literate) were asked to give rank in order of prestige to different categories of cultivators. By 'categories of cultivators' I mean the villagers' ways of participation in 'paddy cultivation' pursuits. The given rank of the prestige have been transmuted into separate scores and they are combined and averaged to give final order of prestige.

The table 27 indicates that all the informants do not give uniform prestige to the categories of cultivators. Again, same category differs in prestige to different informants. Nevertheless, the non-cultivating owner, the owner-supervisor category occupies the prestige rank 1, owner-cultivators get the rank 2, but the share-croppers and contract cultivator categories get unequal prestige rank. Similarly, the 'contract labourer' and the 'day-labourer' are ranked unequally.

TABLE 27

Prestige rank of the categories of cultivators

| Raters*        | Categories of cultivators              |    |                  |               |                      |                   |              |   |
|----------------|--|----|------------------|---------------|----------------------|-------------------|--------------|---|
|                | Non-cultivating owner/owner supervisor |    | Owner-cultivator | Share cropper | Contract culti-vator | Contract labourer | Day-labourer |   |
|                | 1                                      | 2  | 3                | 4             | 5                    | 6                 | 7            | 8 |
| B <sub>1</sub> | Rank                                   | 1  | 2                | 4             | 3                    | 5                 | 6            |   |
|                | Score                                  | 77 | 63               | 46            | 54                   | 37                | 23           |   |
| B <sub>2</sub> | Rank                                   | 1  | 2                | 4             | 2                    | 5                 | 5            |   |
|                | Score                                  | 77 | 63               | 46            | 63                   | 37                | 37           |   |
| B <sub>3</sub> | Rank                                   | 1  | 2                | 3             | —                    | —                 | 27           |   |
|                | Score                                  | 73 | 56               | 43            | —                    | —                 | 4            |   |
| B <sub>4</sub> | Rank                                   | 1  | 3                | 4             | 2                    | 5                 | 6            |   |
|                | Score                                  | 77 | 54               | 46            | 63                   | 37                | 23           |   |
| B <sub>5</sub> | Rank                                   | 1  | —                | —             | 2                    | —                 | 31           |   |
|                | Score                                  | 69 | —                | —             | 50                   | —                 | 3            |   |
| K <sub>1</sub> | Rank                                   | 1  | —                | 2             | —                    | —                 | 31           |   |
|                | Score                                  | 69 | —                | 50            | —                    | —                 | 4            |   |
| K <sub>2</sub> | Rank                                   | 1  | 2                | 3             | —                    | —                 | 27           |   |
|                | Score                                  | 73 | 56               | 43            | —                    | —                 | 4            |   |
| K <sub>3</sub> | Rank                                   | 2  | 1                | 3             | —                    | —                 | 27           |   |
|                | Score                                  | 56 | 73               | 43            | —                    | —                 | 4            |   |
| K <sub>4</sub> | Rank                                   | 2  | —                | 3             | 5                    | —                 | 27           |   |
|                | Score                                  | 56 | —                | 43            | 37                   | —                 | 4            |   |
| K <sub>5</sub> | Rank                                   | 1  | —                | 3             | —                    | —                 | 46           |   |
|                | Score                                  | 69 | —                | 31            | —                    | 4                 | 5            |   |
| S <sub>1</sub> | Rank                                   | 1  | 2                | 3             | —                    | 39                | 24           |   |
|                | Score                                  | 75 | 60               | 50            | —                    | 6                 | 5            |   |
| S <sub>2</sub> | Rank                                   | 2  | 1                | 3             | 4                    | 23                | 37           |   |
|                | Score                                  | 63 | 77               | 54            | 46                   | 5                 | 4            |   |
| S <sub>3</sub> | Rank                                   | 1  | —                | 3             | 2                    | 24                | 39           |   |
|                | Score                                  | 75 | —                | 50            | 60                   | 5                 | 6            |   |
| S <sub>4</sub> | Rank                                   | 1  | 2                | 4             | 3                    | 37                | 23           |   |
|                | Score                                  | 77 | 63               | 46            | 54                   | —                 |              |   |

TABLE 27 (*Contd.*)

| 1                 | 2     | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8  |
|-------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| S <sub>5</sub>    | Rank  | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6  |
|                   | Score | 77  | 63  | 54  | 46  | 37  | 23 |
| M <sub>1</sub>    | Rank  | 2   | 1   | 5   | 3   | 4   | 6  |
|                   | Score | 63  | 77  | 37  | 54  | 46  | 23 |
| M <sub>2</sub>    | Rank  | 2   | 1   | 3   | 6   | 5   | 4  |
|                   | Score | 63  | 77  | 54  | 23  | 37  | 46 |
| M <sub>3</sub>    | Rank  | 1   | 2   | 5   | 3   | 4   | 6  |
|                   | Score | 77  | 63  | 37  | 54  | 46  | 23 |
| M <sub>4</sub>    | Rank  | 1   | 2   | 4   | 3   | 5   | 6  |
|                   | Score | 77  | 63  | 46  | 54  | 37  | 23 |
| M <sub>5</sub>    | Rank  | 1   | 2   | 4   | 3   | 5   | 6  |
|                   | Score | 77  | 63  | 46  | 54  | 37  | 23 |
| Sum of ranks      |       | 25  | 27  | 66  | 45  | 63  | 97 |
| Sum of scores     | 1420  | 971 | 865 | 675 | 474 | 537 |    |
| Mean              |       | 71  | 64  | 45  | 48  | 36  | 26 |
| Order of prestige |       | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6  |

\* B = Brahman informant ; S = Sadgop informant ; K = Kastha informant and M = Mahisya informant.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION : POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF INEQUALITY

#### I

*Kotaigarh* is a multi-ethnic and multi-caste village consisting of seventeen Hindu castes and two tribal groups, viz., the Mahalis and the Bhumijas. Each caste or tribe is an endogamous group and thus is separated from each other by its rules of endogamy and commensality. The villagers always add the adjectives high or low to a particular set of castes or tribes, as such inequalities of status among the villagers are noted (Sengupta, 1973). The village is thus a vertical entity composed of several horizontal layers, each of which is either a caste or a tribe.

At *Kotaigarh* there are many features by which a caste is separated from one another. These are the rules of endogamous marriage, restriction on commensality, the existence of occupational specialisation, different cultural traditions, caste-ethic, existence of caste or tribal council, concept of purity and pollution, receiving and giving of ritual services, concept of *Dharma* and *Karma*, different religious sects and faiths (*Saivism*, *Saktaism*, *Vaishnavism*, *Bongaism* etc.), the distinctive phases of sanskritization, different levels of education, differential distribution of power, prestige and authority (Sengupta, 1973).

Power and prestige are related to land ownership. The lands in *Kotaigarh* though are not concentrated to a particular caste yet the major amount of lands in the village is occupied by the members of the upper castes. Thus, lands though are distributed to many castes yet these are mainly under the control of a particular sector of the villagers. The *highest*, *very high* and the *high* categories of castes hold nearly eightyfive percent village lands. Most of them abstain from tilling the lands. Hence, they offer lands in tenancy, appoint contractual labourers or hired labourers extending credit facility to some other castes or tribes who eagerly await for it (Sengupta, 1970, p. 54). The rentier-farmer, the master-servant and the creditor-debtor relationships are emerged out of the situation and they bind many individuals in economic

ties. The parties involved in these ties are bound in mutual obligation. The system has been viewed by some as a means of provision for the interdependence and local cohesion of the local group (Wiser, 1936); others have stressed that the great power lies with rentier, master and creditor who continuously assure services and credits to the providee (Beidelman, 1959).

Distribution of power and property is an important aspect to understand inequalities or gradations of the castes. There are two general types of stratification (Marshall, 1950, pp. 30-31). First, the stratification is the system in which the difference between one stratum and other, is expressed in terms of legal rights or of established customs which has the essential binding character of law. In its extreme form such a system divides human society into number of distinct hereditary human species. Stratification is an institution in its own right with a plan, in the sense that it is endowed with meaning and purpose. Second, it is not an institution in its own right. Strata emerge from the interplay of a variety of factors related to the institution of property and education and the structure of the national economy. The caste stratification is a subtype of the first general type. Many scholars consider the system of stratification both from distributive and relational aspects. In most of detailed study of caste, the order of caste stratification within the community is referred. Many scholars since 1955 have been carrying on research on Indian castes within the framework of villages. Their intensive field studies have added new depth to our understanding of caste ranking. The earlier notion that the caste ranking is relatively simple and rigid in practice has changed. The problem of caste ranking is complex because of its nebulous nature (Srinivas, 1955). Recently, Marriott (1968) worked out an elaborate scheme of ranking. He took into account the food transactions of various types among the different castes.

Hindu caste system is of special interest to the scholars of stratification. Its close connection with Hindu religion and because of Indian village economy is not a market economy—scholars disagree as to its nature and functions. Many scholars consider it as a division of labour similar in principle of European feudal systems but in which the landowners exploit the landless, aided in this by a religion peculiarly successful in diverting the exploited from arriving at a consciousness of their true situation.

Others treat it as a liturgical or religious organisation serving ends distinct from economic ones (Littlejohn, 1974, p. 68).

Dumont and Pocock (1957, pp. 18-26) conclude that the territorial factor is not the prime basis of social organisation in Indian village. It is secondary to kinship and caste. According to them the village does not possess "sociological reality". The study of Beidelman (1959), Wiser (1936), Mayer (1956) focuses on the significance of social solidarity in the village which is fortified by the *jajmani* system. Beidelman (1959) stresses inequalities of political and economic power and speaks it as a system of exploitation and coercion. Besides, there are many scholars who consider that the life way of Indian villagers is based on exploiter-exploited relationship. The exploiters exert domination through economic and political power. The situation at *Kotaigarh* reveals that upper castes possess the economic and political power through land ownership. Lewis (1958, pp. 55-84) and Beidelman (1959) point out that the differential life chances and unequal distribution of privileges and power are existent in the "Coercive integration" of the village. Marriott (1966) gives a graphic account of a festival of love (*Holi* festival) celebrated at Uttar Pradesh in which castes and sexes cooperate in dramatic reversals of normal roles. For a day the cosmic order is destroyed, the moral order is polluted to be recreated and repurified for another year.

Power is drawn from land ownership, education, social 'honour', money lending, white collar jobs and profession, panchayet membership, income and *style of life* (Sengupta, 1973, p. 70). The upper castes in general exert their power over the lower castes and the tribes. The power (*Sakti*) they hold by means of their achievement of superior education, better social 'honour', involvement in white-collar jobs and profession, control over panchayet, higher income and prestigious *style of life*. The economic growth of India shows a tendency of the proliferation of the variety of occupations with different grades. These various grades of occupations compete with each other to raise their level of pay as against others. These competition is characteristically different from class conflict in Marx's sense. It is noted that occupational grades compete against each other even in communist societies where classes in Marx's sense have been abolished (Karol, 1971). The extent of the dispersal of capital is

not measurable in India. It is difficult to assume how far it has affected the distribution of wealth in India. The theories on elite concept (Bottomore, 1966) think that the ownership in recent time has passed into the hands of the managers from those of the capitalists. This means that the capitalist ruling class has been gradually replaced by the elites—dominant managers in business and finance. In villages, the upper castes are still the owners of major acres of lands. In *Kotaigarh*, particularly, the members of upper castes even now not have missed the control over lands. They exert mainly the economic control over the lower castes and tribes who serve them as menials, share-croppers and servants. The relationship is mutually beneficial but not free from tension and conflict. These conflict and tension are centered round the unequal distribution of power and privileges ensuring the existential order of stratification. The structure of stratification determines the performance level of the individuals and the groups. The performance level is neither ethnically nor racially conditioned. The Negro-White differences in intelligence were studied in United States. The patterns of intelligence were not perceptibly different between the two though they differ racially (UNESCO, 1956). It is noted, however, that the Negroes exhibit lower level of performance than the Whites. This is an important social fact. Parsons and Clark (1967) assign importance for this difference to the unequal position they occupy in the structure of power, class system and status hierarchy in American society. It is true that the study on the difference in intelligence between the upper castes and the lower castes was not taken adequate significance in Indian society. But it is assumed by many that the difference in life style and level of performance are lower among the lower castes in general. The scholars (Dube, 1955; Beidelman, 1959; Srinivas, 1962; Beteille, 1965 and Gould, 1968) directly or indirectly assign importance for this difference to the fact that the lower castes occupy low position in the caste system, structure of religion, power and hierarchy of social honour in Indian society. The lower castes, the *Chhotoloks* and the *Adi-vasis* in general are poorer people in *Kotaigarh* and *Benapur*. They live under the domination of the upper castes or the *Bhadraloks* to serve their interests as dependents.

## II

My interest is on the differences in life chances and life-styles among rural people of West Bengal which result from the different positions they occupy in society as status group aggregates like the *Bhadralok* (people of superior culture), the *Chhotolok* (people of inferior culture), the *Adivasis* (the tribes) and the *Musalmanas* (Muslims).

It is seen in day to day relationship that the *Bhadraloks* (gentry) and the *Nabasakhas* (nine clean artisan and trading castes) are grouped alike while the *Adivasis* (tribe) and the *Chhotoloks* (peasantry) are almost considered equal. But the *Musalmanas* are always categorised separately. But in minor details from the point of cultural characteristics each of them is distinguished from one another.

The words, the *Bhadralok*, the *Nabasakha*, the *Chhotolok*, the *Musalmana* and the *Adivasi* are used here in analytical categories. The estimates are based on the figures available on the caste, the tribe and the Muslim community, landholding, occupation, education and qualitative evidences on other qualities of each category such as *style of life*, cultural values etc. The advantages of the use of these Bengali words are indicative of the attributes, important to the members of each status group aggregate, and the social honour they enjoy. In the sense of Weber (1946) these words viz., the *Bhadralok*, the *Nabasakha*, the *Chhotolok*, the *Adivasi* and the *Musalmana*, underlie the cardinal fact that these are status group aggregates and not economic or occupational classes.

In *Benapur* a man cannot become a *Bhadralok* simply by achieving a given level of wealth, education and getting employment in white-collar jobs and doing business. On the contrary, illiteracy, poverty and unemployment cannot bring down one from the *Bhadralok* status, if he pursues certain prescriptive cultural values and observe minimum social proscription affixed to the *style of life* of the *Bhadraloks*.

This offers again contrast to Sinha's (1969) study on Bergram village of Birbhum district where he has included other castes of the *Nabasakha* group in the *Bhadralok* status. This means that the *Bhadralok* is an open system in Bergram and sanskritization helps one to get the *Bhadralok* status.

In defining status group, Weber (1946) distinguishes between

'open' and 'closed' group. The admission in the latter one is solely determined by birth whereas admission to the former one is possible by the attainment of some recognised and prescriptive features. Benapur situation reveals that the status group aggregates namely the *Bhadralok*, the *Nabasakha*, the *Chhotolok* and the *Adivasi* are closed groups, the entry to any one of the group is hardly possible but one may come out of the group to form a separate group rather than to be absorbed in the others, while *Musalmana* is an open status group aggregate. The membership of the *Bhadralok* status group aggregate is ascriptive in *Benapur* which opposes Broomfield's contention that by urban professional employment, through acquaintance with English language, adoption of cultural values and *style of life* of the *Bhadralok* one may gain *Bhadralok* status. Industrialisation in India is accompanied by the transfer of a large number of working population from agriculture and related occupations to industrial production. The rural craftsman and small farmers in many cases become industrial and agricultural labourers. Gradually with the advances in science and technology, the scope of industrial production together with the use of skilled labour force are increasing. The emergence of science based professions leads to the expansion of old occupations such as teaching and this acquires the status of profession (Cole, 1955). A large section of the population from agriculture and industry has been gradually drawn up into the service sector of economy—white collar workers, clerks, bureaucrats, shop assistants (Rostow, 1960). But this has little effect on the status group aggregates at Benapur. In Benapur, of course, there are formidable difficulties which the villagers cannot overcome for attaining better status. Villagers are known to everybody. Everybody is acquainted with the position of an individual's caste and his cultural characteristics. One is able to change his customs in personal level and even may change his personal position in regional structure of stratification but cannot be accepted into the next upper status. The villagers beliefs in traditional action, confine themselves just outside the margin of the next status group aggregate as sanskritization facilitates only positional change rather than the structural change (Srinivas, 1966). Besides, the *Chhotoloks* were deprived of education from past old days. Even at present their low-economic positions remove them from schooling. The educational system

seems to be costly and expensive to them because their children of ten or twelve year of ages participate in the productive activities with their parents in various ways to add more earning to the family. All these factors are major impediments to the aspiring entrants. The *Bhadraloks* do not admit even good achievers of low born. Even the social reform movements of nineteenth century which had weakened the caste structure of Bengal and minimised the social distances between the low and the high castes had not been tended to overthrow the complete separation between the two. Even today in Benapur the distance between the *Bhadralok* and the *Chhotolok*, the *Bhadralok* and the *Musalmans* and between the *Bhadralok* and the *Adivasi* are still remaining unbridged.

### III

Hierarchy is partly a matter of social and economic organisation. It in fundamental sense, is an expression of religious values (Beteille 1974, p. 60). In India, the ownership and control of land constitute the immediate sources of economic power and land is distributed unequally. Social distances in India are accentuated by the distribution of lands for landowners and the landless belong to higher and lower castes respectively.

Large landowners can abstain from manual work and even the status prevents many landowners from manual work or actual tillage. Labour is also graded according to the position of the landless. The arduous work of the cultivation such as, carrying and cutting earth are relegated to the lowest strata among the landless. Inequalities in the distribution of land are related to inequalities of income. The sizeable landowners through rents earn much income than the share-croppers and agricultural labourers which often come to the subsistence level and below than that.

The distinctions in rural social structure in India are based on the *style of life*. The distinctions in *style of life* are noted through differences in dress, housing, commensal relations, marriage rule, manners and customs. The landowners of sizeable amount live in commodious and spacious houses and the owners of small plots, share-croppers and the agricultural labourers live in small huts.

Literacy and education are also distributed unequally. The owners of sizeable lands have education and level of literacy is low among the share-croppers and the landless population. In addition to inequalities of wealth and status, the rural social system is characterised by power and authority. Now democratic organisation in the form of panchayet and others had been introduced even in village but still the non-owners, share-croppers and labourers have little access to power. They are still at the bottom of the power hierarchy as because, the landowners can exercise their influence over them through the control over their lands.

Parsons (1947) asserts importance to the valuational aspect of stratification. Stratification is the ranking of units in a social system in accordance with the standards of common value system. The rank-order is established by the judgements applied to qualities, performances or possessions of actors in roles. By quality Parsons means position or positions in a social system. There are value standards by which judgements are made : (i) technical norms or efficiency, (ii) achievement norms, (iii) norms assessing contribution to integration and (v) norms relevant to socialisation. It is true that each social system has a distinctive value pattern stressing one or two of the above four types. Similarly, there are different levels of role differentiation in different social system. Each social system puts significance to the role according to its value pattern. The rank-order of the roles is also important for stratification. In pursuing Parsons, Barber (1957, p. 2) stresses that the stratification is the resultant of two processes : role differentiation and ranking in terms of *values*. In assessing the place of power and control of resources in the system of stratification, Parsons (1940, p. 109) points out the inconsistency between the normative rank order and existential rank order of roles. Power depends upon the three sets of factors : (i) evaluation by the common value standards with a character of authority, (ii) the degree to which deviance is permitted and (iii) control of possessions. This last is inevitably linked-up with high status.

Merton (1949) considers that a system of stratification is a series of grades united through consensus on values. If in a particular system there is dissatisfaction with it and alienation from it accrue to the members of the lower stratum, this is because of frustration, as because they have been inbued with the

desire to attain the most highly rewarded positions but have been unable to do so (Littlejohn, 1974).

The characteristic feature of rural society of West Bengal which may be considered as agrarian society is that the inequalities in property, income, privilege and power are combined in the same individuals or castes and the socially under-privileged groups are also economically and politically deprived. The privileged section becomes the beneficiaries of every type of innovation. Generally the non-cultivating landowning castes have the highest status, below them comes the cultivating and artisan castes and at the bottom are the castes of agricultural labourers.

Davis and Moore (1945) and similarly Barber (1957) believe that stratification has two functions : expressive and instrumental. By expressive function they mean that the positions in social structure depend on functional importance. Greater prestige and rewards are offered to those who occupy the functionally important positions which are manifest social values. This ensures the maintenance of consensus regarding values and social integration. They assert importance to the former as a precondition of the latter. The instrumental function indicates that the individuals differ in ability and capacity. Society essentially recognises them to allot more important positions to those who are more qualified. This condition is emerged out of differential distribution of rewards. Social inequality is thus an unconsciously developed device for filling up important positions by the more qualified persons (Davis and Moore, 1945, p. 243).

The old forms of inequalities are going to be replaced by new forms of inequalities in India. In earlier days, in India land was not sold in the market, the right on land was enjoyed by the dominant castes in the village who were in fact the kin-group. The title to land was acquired by clearing of one area for cultivation. Now land has come into the market (Bailey, 1957) though large-scale sale of land is not normally found. Land at present, is widely distributed but unevenly among many castes. This contradicts the exclusiveness of status related to the landownership. In rural West Bengal, the land is disperately distributed among higher as well as lower castes, of course, with sizeable acres to the high castes. The dispersed distribution has brought change in the association of caste and landownership. Further, with the introduction of adult suffrage to the formation of village council, the

traditional status through landownership as the bases of power in the village is going to be faded out gradually. The high caste landowners refrain from manual work as a matter of status. The sizeable landowners appoint tenants for cultivation of their lands. The economic power and status equally play role to create inequality in relations between the landowner and the tenant. Two main theories : the Marxist and the functionalist, explain two mutually exclusive answers to the integration. Functionalists stress significance to the integration through consensus on values and Marxists place importance to the coercion and conflict of interests. For functionalists, the social structure is a functionally integrated system held in equilibrium by certain patterned and recurrent processes. On the other hand, the Marxists conceive the social structure as a form of organisation held together by force and constraint and reaching continuously beyond itself in the sense of producing within itself the forces that maintain it in an unending process of change (Dahrendorf, 1959, p. 159).

The landowners are not all rentiers. There are large landowners who belong to low castes and there are small holders who belong to high castes. Some large landowners who belong to low castes, directly involve in agriculture as *Chasi* or *Krishan* (owner-cultivators) whereas the high caste low holders of land refrain from tilling. The large landowners of high castes as *Jotedar* (non-cultivating owners) and *Mahajan* (owner supervisors) let out their lands for share-cropping or cultivate by hired labourers. They are at the top of agrarian hierarchy. The large holders of low castes, cultivate their lands and use both hired and family labours for cultivation. They do not let out their lands for share-cropping.

The landowners accept social superiority over the tenants as a part of natural order, it is difficult for the latter to establish their rights in relation to the former, however, clearly such rights may be defined (Beteille, 1974, p. 84). Thorner (1954) considers it as an effect of the concession to the hierarchical values in traditional India.

Lenski (1966) synthesises the study of stratification with radical and conservative approaches. He defines the study of the distribution process in society. His primary concepts are power, privilege, prestige and need. Privilege is the resultant of control over some proportion of surplus goods and services in society. Control over surplus depends on power even at the opposition of

others. Production of surplus requires technical sophistication which some primitive societies have not attained. Hence in primitive society distribution takes in terms of needs and equality is the characteristic of primitive social systems. With the development of technology, inequalities become manifest (Littlejohn, 1974, p. 39).

In India land is the important basis of social cleavage. The landowners enjoy better style of living than the landless. They also influence and exercise control over the landless for obvious scarcity of land. In this sense, the relationships between the landowners and the landless are economic and at the same time political. The inequalities in India are viewed through land-ownership because land is scarce to the major section of the people and land is the only means of livelihood. The inequality between the landowners and the landless is fundamental. The landowners (*Jotedar* and *Mahajan*) are the privileged because they possess the lands as a primary means of production. They possess the opportunity to exercise control over others who are landless but require lands for living. Thus land as a means of production acts as a control over persons. It is not a mere possession only (Dahrendorf, 1967). Ossowski (1956, p. 19) points out that the functionalists and the Marxists explain two contrasting conceptions of class structure. The Marxists exemplify class divisions as relations of dependency and the functionalists as ordering relations. The situation of West Bengal is not simple. Here land is possessed by various categories of people. The large holders usually but not exclusively belong to the upper castes. There are large holders of lower castes. The small holders also belong to the lower as well as upper castes though the number of the latter are relatively less.

The landholders of lower castes cultivate their lands and are not directly controlled by the upper castes. Further, the landless cultivators of lower castes come directly under the control of the upper castes as they live upon the lands of the upper castes. The social identity of these two categories of farmers of upper and lower castes is ambiguous. Even their political orientation is of different nature.

The agricultural operations are broadly divided into manual and non-manual types. The manual and non-manual works are performed according to castes. The Brahman and other high

castes abstain from manual work. The *Navasakha* (nine clean) castes avoid arduous work of agriculture which is left to the lower castes. There is furthermore, division of labour between the sexes. The ploughing is done by the men. Women are tabooed to do it. The weeding and transplantation are usually done by the women. The women of the upper caste, clean caste, as well as the women of the Muslim do not work in the field.

It is, therefore, difficult to explain class structure and inequality in agrarian society in simple landowner-landless scheme basing on land and labour. The divisions like rich, middle and poor are even difficult to fit in. The *krishak sabha* in West Bengal divides up the agricultural population into 'rich peasant' 'middle peasant' and the 'poor peasant' but without considering the family size and avenues of expenditure. This classification is difficult to consider sensibly.

Warner (1949, pp. 1-17) in discussing about the methodology for study of social class in America hints at the categories he used in ranking. Various categories he examined to ascertain the attributes of the members of a same category had in common and how these attributes differed from the members of other categories. From his data he arranged the social classes in hierarchy noting the four attributes : (i) different prestige level, higher or lower, (ii) differential association outside of work relationship, (iii) typical differences in the *style of life* and (iv) typical differences in life chances.

Warner and Lunt (1941, p. 366) noted further the three upper classes had a disproportionately small percentage of officers in political hierarchy than the three lower classes. Warner and Lunt (p. 82) redefined the phenomenon of class after studying the New England town having six classes. They noted that many upper class members were poor than many lower class members but they enjoyed better prestige than the latter as because their forefathers had belonged to the class for many generations while those of the latter had not. They redefined the class phenomenon as follow : class indicates the orders of people who are believed to be and accordingly ranked by the members of the community in socially superior and inferior positions.

Dumont (1966) argues that a society can best be understood in terms of the categories, the people use, identify and perceive to classify them within the societal whole. Therefore

the most important divisions are those which the people themselves make and recognise. In rural West Bengal, the people divide them up not only in terms of caste categories but also in some broad economic categories. These two sets of categories are recognised by the people. If the first set can be considered as the categories of community type then the second can be considered as categories of class type (Beteille, 1974). Each of these categories of class type and their mutual relations can be taken into fruitful approach to the study of agrarian class structure.

There are number of categories. Each of these categories are related to paddy cultivation. The people divides them in the economic categories on the basis of their relationship with production systems. These categories are the landowner (*Jotedar, Mahajan, Chasi or Krishan*) the tenants (*Bhagchasi, Sanjachasi*) and the labourers (*Din-majur, Chhut krishan, Baramasi-majur, Nagare*).

The word *Jotedar* is used by landowners having medium or even small holding to refer their share-croppers. The share-croppers are *Jotedar* (Danda and Danda, 1971). This is not true to the extent that one believes it. The word *Jotedar* is used to denote the non-cultivating owners, who live on rents from the tenants. In certain parts of West Bengal, the *Jotedar* have a definite social identity and a measure of economic and cultural unity. This unity is not based on a single criterion either in terms of economic factor or in cultural factor. The productive role, size of holding, caste affiliation or *style of life* are not fixed, discrete and rigid by any means. 'Class' is a force that unites members to form groups. The unification of members to form a group overrides the differences between them, though they differ from one another either in sizes of holding or by caste (Marshall, 1950, p. 114). The force is essentially political in character. There are some economic and cultural differences among the *Jotedar* but they are united to overcome the differences.

The social identity of a category is carried out, by the *style of life*. The *style of life* includes both material and non-material components.. The most important material components are the habitation, dress, food and among the non-material components, the speech and manners are general (Beteille, 1974, pp. 134-5). As regards Marxist theory some scholars claim its universal applicability while others not. Bottemore (1964, p. 195) points out

that Marxist theory is relevant and useful in analysing social and political conflict in capitalist societies during particular period but its utility and relevance elsewhere are much less clear. For Marx, structure in society is to be found in social processes—forms of exchange linking categories. Norms perpetuate a social system but do not explain it (Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 281). Dahrendorf (1964, p. 227) in noting the class structure of European societies, comments that in general terms, the Marxist notion of a society splitting up into two antagonistic classes emerging out of the property structure of the economy is no longer a correct description of European reality and to me it is never a sensible for Indian reality. The function of the states is no longer the protection of private property and the promotion of the interest of a particular class. Birnbaum (1968) states that the original Marxian notion of base and superstructure has little meaning in the face of the concrete totality that political autonomy to the state and economic autonomy to the market are no longer attributable. Capitalism has produced elaboration and hierarchy of grades instead of simplification and polarisation of the division of labour as Marx thought. These grades with income hierarchy and prestige levels are engendering significant social cleavage than that between the property owners and non-owners (Marshall, 1950). Poverty is no longer a class poverty but a case poverty, a matter of individual casualties rather than a consequence of a particular socio-economic structure (Galbraith, 1958). The social relations are discontinued between the people of different grades of occupations because of the differences in the *style of life*, attitudes and values associated with different grades. Individual of each grade compete with each other to improve their positions. This competition brings relatively equitable distribution of income and it is more profitable for understanding stratification in terms of social status rather than in terms of class (Marshall, 1950). This means that the people are more conscious about status rather than class antagonism. Moreover, in recent time owing to the separation of political and industrial conflict, the class conflict has been nurtured by the parliament and state in one hand and by the trade unions and employers' associations on the other. The representatives of the working class are achieving power. This has commendable effect on the distinction between capital and labour, state and economic system and the ruling class and the

oppressed. The distinction has lost the clear cut outline from former times (Dahrendorf, 1959).

The examination of the different modes of productive organisation leads to a consideration of a number of social categories such as landlords, owner cultivator, share-cropper, agricultural labourers. These categories can be studied in terms of relations of equality or inequalities or in relations of conflict and cooperation. The case of West Bengal agrarian categories leads to a consideration that these two perspectives are related.

There are three forms of inequalities: (i) between landlords and the share-croppers, (ii) between landlords and agricultural labourers and (iii) between large, medium and small proprietors. The nature of these categories and the relations is only understandable in relation to castes. The relationships between caste and the agrarian categories are discernible to two kinds: surface relationship and deeper relationship. The surface relationship is manifested by the fact that the landlords are predominantly belong to the upper castes and the landless to the lower castes. In deeper relationship the hierarchical 'values' of caste play vital role to legitimise the inequalities being expressed in relationship of the landlords, share-croppers and the agricultural labourers.

The class categories have no fixed and rigid boundaries. The boundaries are flexible and less distinct than the caste. The castes are exclusive and the classes are not. The same individual cannot be affiliated simultaneously to Brahman and non-Brahman castes. But he can be affiliated to landowner and share-cropper classes simultaneously at the same time. Numerous visible differences are discernible in *life style* and life chances when the sizeable landowners and the landless are taken into comparison. But when the large, medium and small proprietors are compared these differences become fewer and less distinct. Land is highly valued and ownership of land is not only a source of wealth. It is also the locus of power and prestige. Law gives protection to share-croppers but even now the landowners continue to enjoy great power over them. The allocation of land to the landless for cultivation is orally made and identification of the real share-croppers on the basis of lease-deed is rarely possible.

In the material condition of existence there are large inequalities between the landowners and the share-croppers. Still there

are cooperation among these two classes. This does not necessarily mean that there is no perceptible tension and conflict between the landowners and their share-croppers in their day to day relations. These tension and conflicts are only verbally expressed and do not take any organised shape. The organised antagonism between the landowners and their share-croppers is not an important feature of social and political life in rural West Bengal.

Veblan (1931) points out that in a wide range of societies, the relation between *upper* and *lower* classes is not one of *class struggle* but it is one of imitation and emulation of the upper by the lower. Possession of wealth confers prestige. The poor even competes with each other for social status through small increments in wealth. However, conspicuous consumption pattern as an indicative of the *style of life* of the upper classes is important to Veblan as determinant of status symbol.

The conflict and tension which are felt but organised expression do not override the possibility. The tension of classes takes root in two factors: inequalities in existential material condition of living and growth of consciousness of the true class interest. The endogenous factor of development of the inequalities may lead to organised expression through exogenous factor for operation, that is political organisation.

In India economic inequalities are systematised into a stratified pattern by the institution of caste. The caste as a measure of non-competitive mode of production provides harmonic social system in India. The caste acts as an extreme form of social inequality in the material condition of existence. These inequalities are matched with religion and ideology through which they get sanction. Further, the land is not merely the means of livelihood. Land has social significance and it stretches far more than purely economic advantages. It is the locus of social honour and identity. Land is security and for its social significance, the ownership of a small plot of land offers more assured livelihood than even a relatively high income from wage labour.

This again offers contrast to the observations of Mayer (1956) and Lockwood (1966) in Britain, Europe and United States. They showed that in United States, Britain and Europe the high paid manual workers are earning more than low paid non-manual workers. The manual workers are attaining the levels of education and material comfort equivalent to those of the non-

manual workers. In India status of a caste is determined by the acceptability of it as an associate with other castes of equal status in contexts, outside of work. Williams (1956) points out that the difference between the top and second top strata in English village is not one of wealth or occupation but the members of the former behave like gentlemen while the latter do not. The difference is determined purely by the style of life and not occupation. It is true that the sociologists differ in opinion as regard the validity of the study of local stratification for understanding the material model. Because the operations of the institutional complexes, the market, parliament or educational system which are real sources of unequal distribution of income, property or wealth. Stacey (1960, p. 144) studied occupationally varied community in Banbury. He argued that it is impossible to place people into n-fold class system and one social scale ranked on a basis of commonly agreed characteristics. This is because of the separation of the people into local and cosmopolitan systems. The local system is oriented toward traditional social system and cosmopolitan system is originated out of the work situation in which the people ignore the traditional system and derive their frame of reference from organisations and opportunities beyond it. Local system assigns top status to the landowners for generations and the cosmopolitan system asserts importance to the achievements. In most of the villages of India, the people assign importance to the traditional social system based on caste and land distribution principles.

The distribution of lands in India indicates that the landowning castes (upper castes) or the ruling classes (in Marx's sense) still exercise a great deal of power through control over the ownership. This situation resists the attempt of the lower castes to achieve equitable distribution of landed property. However, Lockwood (1964, pp. 35-41) remarks that the property owning classes are still dominant because there is no socialist revolution. He further remarks that it is quite different from conjectural viewpoint that there is no socialist revolution because of the dominance of the property owning classes. It needs empirical substantiation whether social revolution precedes the decline of the dominance of the property owning classes or the decline of the property owing classes is the precondition of the socialist revolution.

It is unpredictable, at this moment, which condition will neutralise the social inequality in India. The governmental measures of curbing the size of the property of the privileged classes and the ceiling to landholding and distribution of non-titled lands to the poor and landless people, enactment of tenancy rights, introduction of panchayeti Raj system in rural areas in viewing of democratization and decentralisation of power are significant efforts to inflict 'check' on the landowning classes from their economic and political domination over the poor or landless for socialist revolution.

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The domain of research on social stratification was confined to the conceptual framework of the sociologists. The anthropologists seldom speak on this area rather than the *status levels*. Since the conceptualisation of caste as an extreme form of stratification by Kroeber in 1931, the anthropologists invested much time and space on the study of caste as a hierarchical system fundamentally based on religion rather than as a system of stratification. The present book however, deviates from the general trend of handling the caste principle, status-group aggregate and class with multidimensional approach to stratification studies.

Stratification of two multicaste and multiethnic villages of West Bengal in the districts of Midnapur and Burdwan has been portrayed in caste, status-group aggregate and class levels. Class level is seen through paddy cultivation activities. Caste alone is not emphasised for changes in caste's attitudes and 'values' in productive roles and ritual purity.

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